




jqhiker37@aol.com
07/28/2011 11:08 PM

To: mellissa_cobern@nps.gov
cc:
bcc:
Subject:

History:  This message has been replied to.

MELISSA;

BEEN A LONG TIME COMING, TO START CHARGING US TO HIKE/BACKPACK
AND I FOR ONE HOPE IT HAPPENS. WE WEAR THE TRAILS AND THE BACK COUNTRY
CAMPSITES OUT FOR FREE AND THAT'S JUST NOT RIGHT. FOR THE PEOPLE THAT
REALLY CARE ABOUT THE SMOKIES, THEY WILL ALL WELCOME THIS.

JIM

P.S.

I STILL THINK WE SHOULD EUTHANIZE THE TOURISTS AND NOT THE BEARS WHEN THEY
HARASS THEM TO THE POINT OF STRIKING BACK.



"PatrickJones_'sticks"
<stickspj@gmail.com>
07/29/2011 09:27 AM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov,
GRSM_SUPERINTENDENT@nps.gov
cc
bcc

Subject Backcountry campsite permit feedback

History: This message has been replied to.

Using Reservation.gov to reserve sites

NO!!! I hate this system and I know others that feel the same about it. It is almost the solitary reason I don't stay in campgrounds that use it to reserve sites. It will make it difficult to plan trips because the system can not understand itinerary demands of a backpacking trip. *It is software, not a human that one can involve in a conversation about alternative routes. All it understands is yes the site is full, no it is not.*

This is a bonehead idea.

Having fees on daily backcountry usage

Again a resounding NO. You are attempting to take away the ability for some to afford a trip to the backcountry. *Are you trying to create an elitist park where those that have money can backpack while that do not have disposable income can not?*

This idea goes against the very concept of the creation of the National Park System!

Again, a bonehead idea.

I can understand the need to control backcountry usage and making all backcountry sites permit only is something that can and should be done at GSMNP. I have backpacked in National Parks that have 100% backcountry permit systems and the key to make this work is to have human interaction. I am one of those that that create several itineraries then walk in and work with the backcountry officer to create a trip. **Reservation.gov will not allow this because it is just a software program. Do not take away the ability to create a trip of a lifetime, this idea will destroy the ability to create this trip.**

Also what about off trail permitting? How is Reservation.gov going to handle this request?

- Making all backcountry sites permit only? **YES**
- Using Reservation.gov to reserve sites? **NO! A THOUSAND TIMES NO**
- Charging fees for backcountry permits? **NO! 100 THOUSAND TIMES NO**

Our parks belong to We the People, not the politicians in Washington or various 'well meaning' employees of the DOI.

Sincerely,

✓

Patrick G. Jones

Bob Miller/GRSM/NPS
07/29/2011 11:28 AM

To GRSMComments@NPS
cc
bcc
Subject Fw: Backcountry fees

Bob Miller
Management Assistant
Great Smoky Mountains National Park
(865) 436-1207
FAX 436-1204

----- Forwarded by Bob Miller/GRSM/NPS on 07/29/2011 11:28 AM -----



Kevin Guerra
<drhntr223@yahoo.com>
07/29/2011 01:45 AM

To "Bob_Miller@nps.gov" <Bob_Miller@nps.gov>
cc "redjenmt@gmail.com" <redjenmt@gmail.com>, Dawn Hill
Beasley <deh5@infionline.net>, Emory Cantrell
<supersled@cox.net>, Elise Eustace
<eliseeus@hotmail.com>, Steve Wachtel
<critrat@gmail.com>, Jennie Freed <jfintn@gmail.com>
Subject Backcountry fees

Bob, I just heard on the news tonight that the park service is thinking of implementing backcountry fees. I am curious how this will effect park visitation. I am concerned that park visitation numbers are already down and that this would curb those numbers even further. As an avid user of the park for backpacking, hiking, and fly fishing I know that in this staggering economy it would hurt myself as well. Im also concerned how would this effect the 1500 thru hikers per year in the Spring that use the Appalachian Trail as well. So I am asking please do what you can to keep this from happening. I think these proposed fees would also hurt donations the Friends of the Smokies and volunteer programs such as trail maintenance as well.

Sincerely
Kevin Guerra

865 436-5588



"Amanda Roberts"
<amanda.roberts@encompassgroup.net>

07/29/2011 02:03 PM

To "or" <GrsmComments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject: Backcountry fees

I think this is a GREAT idea! If we, as backpackers and hikers, expect to use these facilities I think we should have to pay to help keep them up. All things in life aren't free.

Thank you!!!

Amanda Roberts

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This original email was sent to the internet for delivery at 29
Jul 2011 14:03:32 -0400



Dale Potter
<dalepotter55@gmail.com>
07/29/2011 02:16 PM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry changes

While I personally do not like the idea of fees being assessed, I fully understand the reasoning. I think that the reservation system is a great idea for the backcountry sites. The fees should be reasonable.

I would not be for enforcing a daily fee on day hikers as such. A purchase of a monthly pass for day hikers might be acceptable. I would be for requiring the purchase of the annual pass to use the hiking trails.

I would be for horse users having to pay for using their horses on trails. They do a lot of damage to the trails.

The reservation system is a good system for the front country camping, however it needs to be changed..... reservations should open earlier on the campsites, especially Elkmont and Cades Cove. We had some camp at Elkmont this spring and took a chance on the campsites being available. However more would have come had the reservation system been open, but it was too far for some to drive and take a chance. If the loops are full early in Elkmont, the park should open additional loops for reservations.

Balsam Mountain Campground should be added to the reservation system.

Camping fees could be increased, but allow those that buy the annual pass to get a discount on campsites front and back country. This would increase the number of those that buy the pass and allow regular users to benefit from the discount. Other areas do this.

Big South Fork opens their reservation system much earlier than you all do.... they even have hot showers.... and I took two groups of campers there this past spring..... because the options in Elkmont and Cades Cove were limited as to reservations.

I am part of a group, that will be camping at Cades Cove in October. We have secured a large number of the sites for one weekend. The reservation system works great because we can book for enough in advance. There are

times that we would take a smaller group of hikers/campers to Balsam Mountain if we could reserve sites. It is too risky to get off on a Friday afternoon and drive 3-4 hours or longer to get to the campground and discover that it is full or too full to get everyone in.

Just some thoughts.....

Dale Potter



BENJAMIN ANDERSON
<ande8002@bellsouth.net>
07/29/2011 03:09 PM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov
cc Christine_Hoyer@nps.gov, dana_soehn@nps.gov
bcc
Subject Backcountry permit proposal

Dear Dale:

I know that a backcountry permit fee has been discussed at times in the past and there are certainly good reasons to implement one. I do think that having a fee will result in an increase in backcountry campers without a permit, as many backpackers especially in the remotest areas likely will assume that the odds of their being caught without one are quite small. Such a fee also would create a challenge for AT thru-hikers whose long-term itineraries can frequently change.

If a fee is implemented, I would try to cap it at \$4 per person per night and maybe \$8 or \$10 per horse, the latter fee reflecting the major impact horses have on backcountry trails and campsites. Although it may be much more viable economically for the park to charge more than that modest amount, I do think that any fee higher than \$8 per person per night would meet with strong resistance especially since some frontcountry camping fees are still as low as \$14 per site per night.

Thank you for continuing to look at this important backcountry issue.

Best regards,

Ben Anderson
A-A-C volunteer
Asheville, N.C.



John Drummond
<jdrummond@foremostfab.com>

07/29/2011 03:15 PM

To or <GrsmComments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject BACKCOUNTY CAMPING FEES

I am totally in favor of implementing a fee. I live in Northern Indiana but have a home in Wears Valley. We often use the hiking facilities in the park, but we have several friends that back country camp and they would be more than willing to pay a fee. In fact, they have asked me often why you don't charge one.



"Holly Scott \(\(TN)\"
<fotshb@bellsouth.net>

07/29/2011 03:45 PM

To <GrsmComments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Improved Visitor Services and Safety Through New
Backcountry Proposal

Whatever helps the park and its wildlife and visitors, I am all for it!

As stated in the press release by Management Assistant Miller, the proposed changes in the ways that backcountry reservations are handled sound like it will make the system function more efficiently for everyone.

Holly Scott, Marketing Manager
Friends of Great Smoky Mountains National Park
www.FriendsOfTheSmokies.org

Ph: 800-845-5665

Fx: (865) 933-7607



"Wieland, Christopher"
<wielandc@p2s.com>

07/29/2011 04:25 PM

To "GrsmComments@nps.gov" <GrsmComments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry permit fees

I whole-heartedly support the proposal to provide a reservation call center and a fee structure for backcountry camping sites. A call center will eliminate the hassle of getting reservations phone or in person, and the fees will help with trail maintenance and patrols. I personally have had reservations at shelters and found that the bunks were taken by campers without reservations, a problem that can be mitigated by more rangers. I also would hope that some portion of the fees will be reserved for trail maintenance. The fee structure should be modeled on the ones now in place at Grand Canyon and Zion.

Chris Wieland
Oak Ridge, TN
C2wieland@comcast.com

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gomartygo@comcast.net
07/29/2011 05:23 PM

#10
To GrsmComments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry reservation process

Mr. Ranger,

I have just read the proposal and totally welcome this change. Being one of those guys who truly loves the Smokies and has walked every trail this change is welcome, overdue and fair. The shelters are especially prone to overcrowding and we must assume many do not have permits. This is also true of campsites that are popular. For example, I spent a night at CS92 on Memorial Day weekend and there were 18 tents and I estimated 30 people. Another example is CS83 and CS84. These sites always have 12-18 campers on the site. I am certain those fishermen are not there with permits.

Also, I welcome the fees. I believe the reservations would be more available if folks could not able to call in and hold the reservation hoping to put a trip together and then not bothering to cancel reservation if deciding not to come. That said, the proposal does not mention return of some money if the reservation is canceled. reservation.gov does this for campground reservations and I believe this would be a good idea for backcountry as well. Perhaps give back a similar percentage as done now with the campground reservations. This would give an incentive for folks to call in and cancel and opening a spot for someone else.

Some will gripe but it is a small fee to pay for the privilege of spending time in the backcountry.



gomartygo@comcast.net
07/29/2011 05:24 PM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Re: Backcountry reservation process

~~210~~
#10 cont.

I am sorry I forgot to sign my note.

Marty Steele
gomartygo@comcast.net

From: gomartygo@comcast.net
To: GrsmComments@nps.gov
Sent: Friday, July 29, 2011 4:23:22 PM
Subject: Backcountry reservation process

Mr. Ranger,

I have just read the proposal and totally welcome this change. Being one of those guys who truly loves the Smokies and has walked every trail this change is welcome, overdue and fair. The shelters are especially prone to overcrowding and we must assume many do not have permits. This is also true of campsites that are popular. For example, I spent a night at CS92 on Memorial Day weekend and there were 18 tents and I estimated 30 people. Another example is CS83 and CS84. These sites always have 12-18 campers on the site. I am certain those fishermen are not there with permits.

Also, I welcome the fees. I believe the reservations would be more available if folks could not able to call in and hold the reservation hoping to put a trip together and then not bothering to cancel reservation if deciding not to come. That said, the proposal does not mention return of some money if the reservation is canceled. reservation.gov does this for campground reservations and I believe this would be a good idea for backcountry as well. Perhaps give back a similar percentage as done now with the campground reservations. This would give an incentive for folks to call in and cancel and opening a spot for someone else.

Some will gripe but it is a small fee to pay for the privilege of spending time in the backcountry.



James Walters
<waltersc82@yahoo.com>
07/29/2011 05:37 PM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry Fee

I personally feel it is an embarrassment that that were even in this situation because our government has put a vital part of our country's history and the future of our children to have these beautiful lands. I don't think this totally against a fee, I feel it might just be the beginning of more to come. I would feel comfortable if I could this park, and that the federal government would have no access to these funds. I would also like to see the money as for these are the people paying the fees with some going to trails and rangers as well. If these things were part of me sees this as very unattainable. Sorry I just don't see this being a possibility in a government run

Thanks in advanced for your time,

James C. Walters
5921 Bridge Garden Rd.
Knoxville, TN 37912
waltersc82@yahoo.com



James Walters <waltersc82@yahoo.com>
07/29/2011 05:37 PM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry Fee

I personally feel it is an embarrassment that that were even in this situation because our government has put so many things ahead of our park system vital part of our country's history and the future of our children to have these beautiful lands. I don't think this is what Roosevelt had in mind, and a totally against a fee, I feel it might just be the beginning of more to come. I would feel comfortable if I could be assured that the money would stay this park, and that the federal government would have no access to these funds. I would also like to see the money mostly used for backcountry car as for these are the people paying the fees with some going to trails and rangers as well. If these things were possible and attainable I would be open but part of me sees this as very unattainable. Sorry I just don't see this being a possibility in a government run entity.

Thanks in advanced for your time,

James C. Walters
5921 Bridge Garden Rd.
Knoxville, TN 37912
waltersc82@yahoo.com

local hiker to get a yearly backpacking permit is fine. The per-night fee is just too much. It's a very sad day when one of my favorite places on earth is no longer accessible to me, and that's exactly what will happen.

Respectfully,

Jennifer Kelley

Backpacker and 2012 AT thru-hiker



Jen K
<redjenmt@gmail.com>
07/29/2011 05:48 PM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Proposed back country fee

To Whom it May Concern:

I've learned today that the park service is going to consider a back country permit fee for all backpackers now, as to increase ranger service and more strictly enforce the permit system. In my opinion, this measure needs to be struck down, or it will ultimately fail.

As a backpacker myself, who made her first backpack trip to the Kephart Shelter in 2008, I'm appalled at the proposed 15-dollar plus 5-dollar-per-person fee. This fee, in the opinion of many I know, is outrageously high and will punish local hikers. As the park doesn't allow for dogs on leashes, I already have to pay a 35-dollar-per-night fee to board my dog on a weekend night. Add 15 plus 5 so my husband can join me and we're talking about 55 bucks a night to "enjoy" in the back country. In fact, the boarding fee is already too high for us and over the last 6 months, we've been choosing other smaller state parks to backpack, such as Frozen Head and Big South Fork, where we can stay for only 5 dollars. I do day hike in the Smokies these days, but it's getting increasingly harder to hike the trails I love due to the fact that I can't afford it. Add this fee and I can assure you I'll take my business and money elsewhere, as will many of our other hiking friends.

As a member of two outdoor hiking groups, I can assure you that many hikers are appalled by the proposal. I can honestly say every run in I've ever had with a ranger has been a terrible experience and I've never once wished I could run in to one. The only times I've ever met one on the trail, they interrogate me of my whereabouts, demand permits while I'm moving, and I've been asked twice if they could look in my pack. All of these times I have been respectful and not treated the same way. I've never felt like more rangers in the park, especially with hateful and demeaning attitudes towards backpackers, would make me feel "safe" or enforce anything. The opposite can be said for AT ridge runners. They're always helpful, friendly, and take care of situations in a respectful manner.

In my opinion, as the park cannot charge an entrance fee as 441 is a major US highway, is that the park service needs to up front country fees (where 99% of your tourist traffic goes). I also encourage entrance fees for Cades Cove, as you're only going one place if you're going there. I feel this would make much more money than a back country fee. If the park service is dead set on a back country fee, why not charge horse campers per horse? Every horse camp I've been too has been in terrible shape and I always pack out at least a pound of trash. All trails in the park that allow horses are badly eroded and are mostly in terrible shape as well.

As a hiker who will be thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail next year, I'm also forced to wonder how this fee will affect us. How is a person going to be able to afford 15 bucks per night at 5-6 nights in the GSMNP?

I truly understand that in times like these all places are a bit strapped for cash, and I'm not opposed to a backpacker fee. I implore you to look at a much lower fee (much like the cheaper parks in the area). I strongly urge raising front country fees as you'll have a lot more to work with. I even feel a higher fee for horse campers is a good place to start. Even a flat rate for a



"dawn beasley"
<debeasley@mindspring.com>
>

07/29/2011 06:20 PM

To "or" <GrsmComments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject: Backcountry Reservation Fees

To Whom it may concern:

So there is a problem now with overcrowding at back country campsites due to people staying at reservation sites who do not have reservations. Would the charging of reservation fees not make more people stay in campsites illegally? How exactly would this be policed? I understand that more rangers could be hired, but will they be stationed at each campsite and have the ability to check to see if a backpacker did pay the fee on-line for a site? In my hiking of the park I have found that in most cases the backcountry users are more conscientious of how to have a low impact in the park than those who are doing short day hikes who think that their water bottles and granola bar wrappers that are left on the side of the trail just automatically disappear. But in some cases, they do because a backpacker who doesn't want to see the tourist's trash on the trail picks it up and carries it out. I know that there are some sites that are overly used and abused by those who are not educated or just do not care about the backcountry, but I myself and others that I backpack with have tried our best to clean up these areas and always leave the site in as good as or better shape than it was in when we arrived. We are not asked to do this but want to protect the wilderness that we so enjoy experiencing. I also have concerns that if you are required to reserve in advance and pay a fee for the backcountry sites that there will be more people who will go backpacking and will duck off of the trail and create an illegal campsite, which will not have bear cables and most likely there would cause more food storage violations and an increased impact on wildlife and plants in the park.

I spend numerous weekends per year in the park at backcountry campsites and I feel that the charging of reservation fees would have a negative impact on the backcountry experience. If people are using the backcountry now with out taking the time to make the required reservations it is unlikely that charging a fee will encourage those people to make reservations, and the honest folks who make every effort now to follow the park regulations will either have to pay the fee or will stop backpacking in the park. This could negatively impact those who are backpacking with little or no backcountry knowledge as there may be no one at the campsite to tell them they can't leave food out and how to use a bear cable.

Thank you for your consideration of my opinions as the park and the backcountry is near and dear to my heart. I am a member of several hiking clubs and of the 900 mile club and enjoy spending relaxing weekends in the woods.

Sincerely,
Dawn Beasley
Deh5@infionline.net



"Melissa Chalk"
<melissa1@melissaonthetrail.
com>

07/29/2011 06:59 PM

Please respond to
"Melissa Chalk"
<melissa1@melissaonthetrail.c
om>

To <GrsmComments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject: Proposed fees

I am writing to let you know how I feel about the fee proposals.
I am all for reasonable fees to keep my Smokies clean and pristine.
As a solo hiker a lot of the time I like the \$4 per person per night fee.
Any of the other proposals would be too expensive for me and force me to go backpacking elsewhere.
I am also in favor of paying a yearly fee so that I can make reservations at anytime.

Thanks for listening

Melissa Smith
636 St Johns Dr
Dandridge TN 37725



"LaFond, Franklin"
<flafond@scrippsnetworks.com>

07/29/2011 07:11 PM

To "GrsmComments@nps.gov" <GrsmComments@nps.gov>
cc "ox97game@aol.com" <ox97game@aol.com>

bcc

Subject GSMNP Backcountry Permit fee discussion

History: This message has been replied to.

I think that the fee for backcountry permits is long overdue in GSMNP. I also agree with the write up that it has been extremely frustrating in the past to be able to contact the backcountry permit office to either get, or cancel a reservation. Funding of a better reservation system by backcountry fee is an excellent solution to this. I have traveled all over the United States and hiked in many of the National Parks. Most (if not all) of the other National Parks have fees for both park entrance and backcountry permits.

There are a couple of questions that I do have about this and am sure that your folks are already looking into these.

- a) Would permits be available on a multiple visit basis (monthly pass, annual pass, lifetime pass, etc), or will it only be available on a per visit basis? If 'multiple visit' type passes are available, the reservation system should allow storing the pass # for reference when making a reservation.
- b) I am a SMHC maintainer, currently Russell Field Shelter to Mollies Ridge Shelter. What sort of pay structures are being considered for the AAT/AAC and SMHC Maintainers? Here are some suggestions.
 - a. Maintainers in good standing have fee waived
 - b. Long Term GSMNP Maintainer pass. Pay one time, good for as long as you are in good standing as a maintainer
 - c. Annual GSMNP passes, pay one time, good for a year.
 - d. Leverage the Annual National Park Pass
- c) Although I am a maintainer, there are many times that I enjoy just taking a backpacking trip in the park. I am a current 900 miler, working on my second pass through the park. Would a maintainer's type permit also be applicable for leisure trips?

I also am a member of the SMHC's Appalachian Trail Maintenance Committee. Im sure that Melissa, Dana, and/or George will discuss this topic with us at our upcoming August or September meeting.

I look forward to hearing more about this topic and would be happy to assist in any manner that you might want.

Ox 97 Ga-Me
SMHC Maintainer

Franklin LaFond | Project Manager, IT Commercial Applications
9721 Sherrill Blvd, Knoxville TN 37932
Office: 865-560-4341 | Mobile: 865-414-4822
flafond@scrippsnetworks.com

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mhfloan@bellsouth.net

07/29/2011 08:40 PM

To GRSMcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject From NPS.gov: backcountry fees

Email submitted from: mhfloan@bellsouth.net at /grsm/parknews/bc-permit-restructure.htm

I have recently read about your consideration of backcountry camping fees. I volunteer for the SMNP and help clean up some of the trash left behind by campers. I am in favor of reasonable fees for use of the backcountry as well as think it would be great if you would require a written plan by anybody ie: what the purpose is, what they are taking in and making sure that they really understand LNT ethics. I believe use of the park is a priveledge not a right, and hopefully this may deter people, who probably shouldn't be in the backcountry, from trashing and or becoming a burden on the park service because of something they did out of ignorance. I also think campfires should be banned in the backcountry. They seem to be used primarily for disposal of trash or anything else they choose not to carry out because of bad planning or ignorance of LNT ethics. You may also be able to use some of the funds to help keep the areas natural. I really don't think anybody who cares about our natural resource would mind reasonable fees for their useage



Jarrek Warengo
<trafficlight8@yahoo.com>
07/29/2011 09:29 PM

#17
To "GrsmComments@nps.gov" <GrsmComments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry Fee

I fully support the idea of charging a fee for backcountry camping permits, it would greatly enhance the experience.

Jarrek Warengo
Sevierville TN



Jon Kluever
<simplykluever@yahoo.com>
07/30/2011 08:21 AM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry User Fee

I have been visiting the Smoky Mountains all my life, 29 years. I love the park, and I love the idea of charging a fee to help support the park. However, I feel that an entry fee would be better than a backcountry camping fee. Tax everyone that enters the park. This would help raise funds for the park, and possibly lower the number of vehicles that drive through and pollute the air. Maybe we could see more buses, and less cars that carry only small numbers of people. I understand that charging a fee would involve some huge changes to what was originally decided when the land became a National Park, but I feel this is a better decision.

Sincerely,
Jon Kluever



Robert Keener
<Robert.Keener@scouting.org>
>

07/30/2011 10:08 AM

To "GrsmComments@nps.gov" <GrsmComments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject: Backcountry User Fee

I just read in this morning's Knoxville News Sentinel that the park service is considering a backcountry permit fee. I wholeheartedly endorse this concept. As someone who backpacked a lot during the 1970's before any permit system was in place, I recall areas like Spence Field being extremely overcrowded and dirty, even to the point of resembling a small garbage dump. Bears were a constant problem. Today, with the permit system in place, the quality of the wilderness experience has gotten a lot better. The fee system is the next logical step in the contentious improvement of the wilderness experience for backcountry users. I hope this idea becomes reality.

Robert Keener | Area Director

BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA
Southern Region Area 6

11407 Bancroft Lane
Knoxville, TN 37934
P 865-246-8371 | F 865-288-0125
Robert.Keener@Scouting.org



Prepared. For Life.™



James Johnson
<misterjj.win@gmail.com>
07/30/2011 02:02 PM

#20
To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject: Backcountry reservation proposal

As a long time visitor to GSMNP, I am opposed to all of the fee based aspects of your proposal. Your proposed fee rates would make backcountry camping more expensive than your campgrounds, and that is not how it should be. I would not object as much to a per reservation fee, but a nightly per person fee would make it difficult to take my kids and visit the backcountry in the park. If this proposal is implemented, my family would be more inclined to take them to one of our great National Forest areas which are much closer and still free, thus avoiding GSMNP. Not only will the park lose my money, but so will the towns and businesses that are in close proximity to the park.

I have also heard only negative reviews about Recreation.gov, though I have never used the site myself.

Please do not implement this system.

You guys have always done a great job in the park. Thank you for your service in keeping such a wonderful place open.

Sincerely,
James P Johnson



craig_hutto@yahoo.com

07/30/2011 02:19 PM

Please respond to
craig_hutto@yahoo.com

To GrsmComments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Back country permits

Although I will not be able to attend the meetings, I am strongly in favor of implementing a computerized reservation system to expedite this process.
Sent from my Verizon Wireless BlackBerry



thomas mcMahon
<tmcretired50@live.com>
07/30/2011 02:49 PM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject user fee

Dear Superintendent

I have lived in Tennessee for the last three years I have hiked all the trails on the Tennessee side, more than half of the AT in the Great Smoky Mountains and have 344 mile left on the North Carolina side I have done so without overnight hikes. I would like to say in that time I have encountered many of the trail crews and must say they are hard working caring young men that don't get enough credit for the great job they do on the trails. The park is a gem I just love hiking there I have also meet some of the rangers also hard working friendly, helpful men and women they also should get much more credit. I have hiked many mile have never left a foot print other then a boot print I have cleared small trees and limbs from the trails as I hike as long as I can move them I have learned much from the other hikers I have encountered from all over the United States and many from other countries.

I was reading the paper today and was taken back by the headline on page four I started thinking I remember being told that the park would never charge for coming into the park something to do with the people who lived there before it was a park. I also started thinking the first thing I learned try to never make a foot print stay on the trail don't make the trail wider what you bring in carry out if you see litter pick it up and carry it out and I do. I will get to my point I was shocked at what was done in parts of the park first at the Sinks, second at Elkmont I am sure there is something that I have not seen yet. I can only ask you is that not a foot print? I have talked to many people who did not care for the work that was done and many who just did not care I am a member of the GSMA I love the park and I guess the point of my letter is I don't think its a good idea to charge for back country camp sites no charge for the shelters on the AT. I thank you all for your hard work but please put me down as against the fee, just an idea why not charge for a horse they damage the trails that get heavy use and it seems that the crews make steps on the steep trails and spend more time on those trails.

In closing my name is Tom McMahon 333 smoky crossing way seymour TN. 37865 Phone 573-6068
Thanks for your time

TMc/Retired



"Dave/Carol Anderson"
<ander743@bellsouth.net>
07/30/2011 03:48 PM

#23
To <GrsmComments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry Permit Fees

I have had a number of experiences in the backcountry and with the backcountry office at the SVC. The backcountry office has provided excellent service, but is understaffed and overworked. The backcountry areas need more ranger patrolling, assistance and support. The honor system for backpackers and horsemen is definitely broken. Your plan to charge fees for backcountry usage is excellent. The fees will benefit all users. Carol Anderson, 743 Bowman Bend Road, Harriman, TN 37748



Eric Baker
<ericbaker1988@gmail.com>
07/30/2011 05:30 PM

#24
To GrsmComments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry campsite fees

I read an article in the mountain press about maybe making certain backcountry sites have fees. I understand the need for more rangers, but I was curious if some of that money could be used for privies at the shelters along the appalachian trail to cut down on the enviromental impact of 100's of thru hikers using the current cathole system. I find that this leads to the areas around the shelter being unsanitary and over use of the same site. When it rains the areas become like a septic tank which can cause dease to spread through hikers.

Thanks for your consideration.



<hedgemary@peoplepc.com>
07/30/2011 09:03 PM

425
To <GrsmComments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry Overnight Use rFees

It would be sad to see a backcountry campsite fee program happen. Perhaps it is necessary to better maintain the current shelters and campsites but imposing fees seems extreme.

Dana Soehn proposed at one of the VIP training sessions that VIPs roving in uniform throughout the Park's trails would help park service presence and perhaps prevent some of the problems being encountered. Although VIP's have no enforcement duties they are a reminder that the Park is interested in their visitors and issues. Many times while roving in uniform (before it was discouraged) I have reminded those on trails or about to proceed on trails that dogs are prohibited. Also while in campsites and on trails reminders to campers and hikers to protect their food by using provided food storage systems, to be careful of their open fires, providing LNT info, and generally answering questions seemed helpful to those contacted.

Walter Hedge--VIP
hedgemary@peoplepc.com



"Clyde B. Austin III"
<iceaxe@suddenlink.net>
07/31/2011 06:31 PM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc "Ray Payne" <rpayne10@bellsouth.net>, "Mike Harrington"
<mikie_h@bellsouth.net>, "Doug McFalls"
<dougmcfalls@yahoo.com>

bcc

Subject Proposed Backcountry Reservation Restructuring

Dear Sirs,

I am a frequent user of the backcountry in the Smoky Mountain National Park and I am in favor of the reservation system changes that I have seen proposed. I would welcome paying a fee for backcountry shelter and campsite use IF it would increase the presence of rangers in the backcountry. In my opinion people using both campsites and shelters without reservations is epidemic and a problem (along with camping away from campsites also!), it is worse in the shelters because there just isn't space except for 12-14 people inside. At least in the campsites you can generally find someplace to put a tent. Being able to make the reservations online would make life easier. I would suggest if you make a reservation online, you should have to pay for it when you make it to avoid people making reservations and then not using them, also, no refunds should be allowed for the same reason. Any of the fee structures I saw proposed would be fine. I would state that horse campers should have to pay extra for their stock. They do far more trail damage and campsite damage than hikers do.

I would like to comment on the AT Trail Shelters and thru hikers. At the least each shelter needs a prominent sign with something to the effect, "*Attention Thru Hikers, All campers with reservations at this shelter have preference for bunk space over thru hikers. If there is not sufficient space, thru hikers MUST stay outside*". I would prefer that thru hikers be subject to having to make reservations just as the rest of us are required to do, but I suspect that is not going to happen. In any case it is, in my opinion the best option. I have on several occasions been told by thru hikers that they have preference over park only backpackers in the shelter (which Bill Bryson in his infamous book, "A Walk in the Woods" also tells them, he should have been shot at sunrise for that). I don't know how the fact that park only backpackers with reservations have preference is being communicated to thru hikers, but it is not working. Add to that people going to shelters without reservations and they are a mess. I just won't use AT trail shelters during thru hiker season for these reasons.

Again, I applaud your potential changes of an online reservation system, making all backcountry campsites reservation sites, fees for use, and an increased ranger presence in the backcountry.

Thank you,

Clyde Austin III

3404 Timberlake Ct.

Kinston, NC 28504

(252) 527-0146

iceaxe@suddenlink.net



smoky0325@comcast.net
08/01/2011 12:05 AM

#27
To GrsmComments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject possible fee charge

To whom it may concern,

Please don't make it difficult to enjoy the best park in the nation. I currently donate to the friends of the smokies, Great Smoky Mountain Association, and the Appalachian bear rescue. When entering the park it is normally a family outing, this includes my thirteen year old daughter. We started her backpacking at an early age and believe me she gets just as disgusted at trashed up campsites as her parents do. My hope is that she continues to enjoy the park more and TV less. I might be in the minority but I'm willing to pay a small yearly fee for frequenting the park but I'm not sure that I'm willing to pay each and every time I enter the park to enjoy the backcountry. I honestly believe Tn has the best national park in the country and I'm asking you to simply give the option of a small yearly fee to frequent fliers of the park. It appears the park wants to go from zero to a hundred miles an hour in a very short period of time. Unfortunately this will drive many to other wilderness area's to enjoy their backpacking activities. Thanks for listening.

Thanks,
Frank W

please don't go to a web based reservation system for the backcountry. I enjoy calling in and have never really had an issue.



lesrust@bellsouth.net
08/01/2011 08:03 AM

#28
To GRSMcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject From NPS.gov: Backcountry Permit Fees

Email submitted from: lesrust@bellsouth.net at /grsm/parknews/bc-permit-restructure.htm

Mailing Address
Leslie D. Rust
500 Linden Circle
Athens, TN 37303
USA

I am writing in support of the proposed online/phone reservation system and also in support of fees for backcountry camping. I have reserved sites at the LeConte Shelter several times in the past few years. I have experienced the long waits and redails trying to get an answer from the backcountry office. I think they do a great job, but in a day where we have the technology to ease their work load and handle such routine matters electronically, it only makes sense to let the machines handle the routine communications. I am also in favor of backcountry fees. I would suggest \$5.00/person for backcountry sites and \$10.00/person for shelters. I do not think that those costs are out of reach of folks and I would welcome the chance to see those funds going towards backcountry rangers and maintenance. It is a blessing that we've had a free park for so long, but in this day of government debt, asking hikers and backpackers to pick up some of the direct costs associated with their use of the park is fair and reasonable. I'll be heading up LeConte two weeks from today with my daughter, I appreciate the park service and the work you do to preserve this treasure for us all.



ernestwiles09@comcast.net
08/01/2011 08:14 AM

#29
To GRSMcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject From NPS.gov: back counrty camp fees

Email submitted from: ernestwiles09@comcast.net at /grsm/parknews/bc-permit-restructure.htm

will AT thru hikers have to pay also



"Groff, John A CPT RET"
<alex.groff@us.army.mil>

08/01/2011 12:04 PM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry Fees

Dear Superintendent,

I laud the idea of improving the reservation system for backcountry camping, it is in need of improvement. The list of projects that you want to cover with the new fees are needed. However, I strongly disagree with your intent to charge a \$20 or \$30 fee to people who want to visit the backcountry. Backpacking with my children is one of the few activities that we can do as a family. We enjoy going deep into the backcountry and seeing what very few visitors to the Smokies get to see. It is one of the few activities that can be done for little or no money. In these hard economic times, every little bit helps. I am not opposed to a small fee (less than \$5). I even see the need for it, but a \$20 to \$30 fee seems excessive. If the new fee is set in place, I may not be able to participate as much as I would like. Millions of people come to the park every year, only a small percentage get into the backcountry. I believe that you would be able to generate more revenues for the entire park by charging a small entrance fee (\$1) at the major entries for anyone entering the park. The main areas of the park that people visit require millions of dollars in upkeep and maintenance. The backcountry facilities require only a percentage of that. It is not fair to impose usage fees for the park only on those who venture on the road less travelled.

Sincerely,

Alex Groff
865-335-5688

Alex Groff
865-335-5688



Eddy <ewker@yahoo.com>
08/01/2011 12:28 PM

#31
To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry permits for all sites

I am totally against this happening. If and when I decide to go backpacking in the park it may be a spur of the moment idea. There is no way I could get a permit 72 hours in advance esp through the recreation.gov

It seems you want to punish the folks who enjoy getting out into the woods. Day hikers won't have to pay....why not? they are using the same trails that backpackers are using. Why not make the horse people pay? Horses ruin the trails faster than backpackers.

There is no way you could hire enough rangers to check every campsite everyday. How many campsites sit unused during the week or in the winter. As many times as I have been to the park I have never seen a ranger walking the trails. Maybe i was lucky but I don't believe that.

This idea is not going to fly IMO.

I hope the park totally does away with this idea

Eddy



Mike Silver
<dmsilver@charter.net>
08/01/2011 02:40 PM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Back Country Camping Changes for Smokies

As a frequent user of back country sites I encourage common sense improvements to the reservation system. My initial concern is for people starting a thru hike on the Appalachian Trail. Their ambition often exceeds their grasp and they are unable to make their initial schedule. And sometimes the opposite is true and their schedule might hold them back if they are too conservative in their planning. Please make some allowance for thru hikers who might have a hard time with a schedule.

Thank you.

D. Michael Silver



Philip Coyle
<pcoyl@email.wcu.edu>
08/01/2011 03:05 PM

33
To "GrsmComments@nps.gov" <GrsmComments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry permitting

The Asheville C-T just posted a headline about proposed changes to backcountry permitting. The website they provide does not have a clear document, but rather opens as a zipfile that has no obvious document to open in order to read about the proposed changes:

<http://www.nps.gov/grsm/parkmgmt/index.htm>

I recommend going back into the website and linking to a simple document.

In the meantime, I'd like to say that I am very opposed to changes in backcountry permitting. I am a frequent backpacker in the GRSM and I have not seen any problems with the current system, particularly at the sites where I typically camp, which are away from the AT and Fontana.

If a fee structure is imposed, I suggest that it focus only on these heavily used campsites. It would be ridiculous to pay for the site at Newton Bald, for example, which is almost always empty.

Still, by fundamental comment is that this change seems like a solution looking for a problem that doesn't exist. We are already paying for these sites with our tax dollars, and I have no interest in paying extra to a private contractor to camp on MY public land.

Sincerely
Philip E. (Ted) Coyle

--

34

Bob Miller/GRSM/NPS
08/02/2011 08:37 AM

To GRSMComments@NPS
cc
bcc
Subject Fw: From NPS.gov: User Fees

Bob Miller
Management Assistant
Great Smoky Mountains National Park
(865) 436-1207
FAX 436-1204

----- Forwarded by Bob Miller/GRSM/NPS on 08/02/2011 08:36 AM -----

Coralie Bloom/GRSM/NPS
08/01/2011 07:36 AM

To Bob Miller/GRSM/NPS@NPS
cc
Subject Fw: From NPS.gov: User Fees

One for your comments box.

Coralie Bloom
Great Smoky Mountains National Park

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

----- Forwarded by Coralie Bloom/GRSM/NPS on 08/01/2011 07:35 AM -----



steve-hixson@att.net
07/29/2011 08:56 AM

To GRSM_Smokies_Information@nps.gov
cc
Subject From NPS.gov: User Fees

Email submitted from: steve-hixson@att.net

First I do not need a reply. I've heard reports that the Park is considering a charge for backcountry camping/hiking. This seems to me to be a GOOD and FAIR idea. I day-hike in the Park a LOT in the Fall, Winter and Spring. I backpack occasionally. A fee of around \$15 to \$20 for a backpacking TRIP would be fine with me. I would not even mind some sort of annual fee for the privilege of day-hiking. Maybe there could be a small per/day fee for folks who are here for only a brief time and the option of an annual fee for those of us who live close to the Park. There could be a tag to purchase that we could hang on our packs. I would not want to have to pay each

time because I often leave VERY early in the morning. Something in the neighborhood of \$20-\$30 would not seem an excessive price. I sometimes get to go to some of our other Parks and pay fees there. While it has been nice to be able to use the Smokies for free (I do make annual contributions to Friends of the Smokies), it is probably time to help our local Park in this way.
Steve Hixson Knoxville, TN



jeremy Lloyd
<jeremyblloyd@yahoo.com>

08/02/2011 10:44 AM

Please respond to
jeremy Lloyd
<jeremyblloyd@yahoo.com>

To "GrsmComments@nps.gov" <GrsmComments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject comments on backcountry restructuring proposal

To Whom It May Concern

~~I am strongly in favor of the proposed changes to the backcountry reservation system.~~ I would advise that the highest amount proposed (\$10 per reservation plus \$5 per person) be adopted, as this will result in much-needed revenue for the park. Reservations for all backcountry sites would also make much more sense than the current system. Overall, I think the proposed changes are an excellent step in the right direction.

Jeremy Lloyd



"SGT Rock"
<sgtrock@hikinghq.net>
08/02/2011 11:29 AM

2/4
To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry Office & Permit System Restructuring
Proposal July 25, 2011

To whom it may concern,

I have read the proposal for re-structuring the Great Smokey Mountain National Park Backcountry Reservation System. I am a frequent user of the backcountry in the park, I have used the reservation system many times, and have some thoughts based on my experiences.

1. I do not think that all back-country sites need to require a reservation. I normally use non-reservation sites with a grab-n-go hike plan and avoid the reservation sites that are the popular ones that fill up fast and have crowds at them. Unlike what your proposal says: I have never found these sites to be overcrowded. In fact, I can only remember **two** times even having to share one of these camps with another person, and only one of these times was inside peak hiking season. You can check my history of reservations that I have made through the current reservation system to see how frequently I use it and how many different seasons that use covers, I know from the few times I do call in that they have most of my GSMNP hiking history there: Ernest Engman, 3850 Laws Chapel Road, Maryville TN.

2. I love the folks that work at the reservation office. I do drop by and talk with them occasionally even when I don't need their help. That said, the "quality" trip planning (when I do need a reservation) often includes hearing that my mileage is too high on some day of my trip and I can't go that far. I hike hundreds of miles a year (not just in the park) and I know better than someone on the other end of the phone how far I can go. Other than that, I have only had one quality suggestion when one of the places I wanted to go was full - and I could have figured that out for myself. One time I was even denied a reservation at an empty campsite because I didn't have a horse with me - as I understand it, there is no such thing as a horse packer only campsite (campsite 36) (Ref: <http://www.nps.gov/grsm/parkmgmt/upload/2011-GRSMNP-Compendium-FINAL-7-01-2011.pdf> page 10). I don't need quality trip planning, many people don't either.

3. There is still the option for doing a walk-in plan at the reservation office. BUT this doesn't allow me to do what I normally do and walk into the park somewhere other than the Sugarlands and drop off my permit as I am walking in at some other place using non-reservation campsites. I suspect that many other folks do the same thing from my experience dropping those permits off at the other entry points. I frequently see many other permits in the container and know that not all those people need this new system.

4. I really don't want to pay for my permits, but I can sort of understand why. The Park uses paid maintainers on most of its trails, and that isn't cheap. However most of the damage is from horses in my experience. I would recommend a per-horse fee in addition to any fee for hikers. So a horse camper would need to pay \$10 + \$5 per person, + \$20 per horse or something like that.

5. This proposal has no plan for thru-hikers. There are three long trails I can think of that go into the park (MST, AT, BMT) where thru-hikers will not be able to know ahead of time when they may arrive to the park, nor do they have computer access, may not have phone

access, and will not be able to swing past the Sugarlands before entering the park. They need to have an exception or some sort of process that works for these people. I am a member of the ATC, the BMTA, and have thru-hiked both those trails through the park. I also write the thru-hikers guide for the BMT, I am a contributor on the AT Guide for AT thru-hikers, and I was one of the administrators of www.Whiteblaze.net which is the largest AT related website. I can tell you with some authority that this plan will really screw up some people's hikes and their ability to get through the park.

That is just based on my first reading of this. I hope to go to one of their Open House things and see what they have to say.

My recommendations for this:

1. Have the new reservation system apply to the current reservation required backcountry sites only.
2. Same as above. AND make sure the folks running this know the rules.
3. Maintain the current set of permit drop off points in the park for folks using the non-reservation points. These places already have trail map payment slots, have the payments for the non-reservation permits work the same way if you do end up charging.
4. I would personally recommend not charging for backcountry sites that don't require permits now. But if you did, maybe the scale could be \$10 + \$5 for non-permit sites, and then \$10 + \$2.50 per night per person for the reservation sites that currently exist. So if I decided to camp and use a mix of sites (which I sometimes do now) it would be \$10 + \$5 + \$2.50 per reservation site.
5. Come up with a set of exemptions for thru-hikers of the three long trails that use the park (AT, BMT, MST). Currently on the PCT there is a special reservation system for thru-hikers where they can get a thru-hiker permit for one cost. That way a thru-hiker for one of these trails could call and get a thru-hiker permit for \$10 + \$5 (non-refundable) but wouldn't have to have an itinerary of backcountry locations they plan to stay at. This could help the park as many people that plan and start a thru-hike never get into or past the Smokies, and that could generate revenue for the park service while at the same time giving a better estimate as to how many people actually make it through.

Ernest Engman
MSG(R), US Army



Jeff Woods
<jeffwoods55@gmail.com>

08/02/2011 12:52 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry Office & Permit System Restructuring
Proposal July 25, 2011

I am adamantly opposed to backcountry fees. I backpack frequently in the park and cannot afford to pay these proposed fees.

Jeff Woods
1515 Russell St.
Nashville, TN 37206
615-291-6310



Eric Rollins
<erollins@gmail.com>
08/02/2011 04:34 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry Fee

Whomever it may concern,

As a resident of Asheville, NC, I have grown up camping and fishing in the Smokies backcountry since I was 10 years old. That was 13 years ago, and I plan to continue enjoying it for some time to come. After returning just the other day from backcountry camping to discover that the park is planning on charging a fee to camp in the backcountry I must admit that I am astounded. I recently read the proposal and find it both vague and unnecessary.

I have camped the backcountry with dozens of different people, none of which have ever found it difficult to put in a paper-permit for camping. Aside from that, as available as information is on the internet, I don't see why anyone wishing to camp the backcountry wouldn't be able to find out more than is sufficient to plan their trip in the Smokies. There are NUMEROUS resources online and both in published books. Claiming that the fee put forth will go to helping notify visitors of bear problems, closures, etc is absolutely ludicrous. Closures may occur at any time, and campers using the online reservation system might not see those before heading off into the backcountry. In my opinion, it is better and more economical to post closures directly to the nps as has been already been. In reality, the best notification is directly at the trailhead, as it is the place visitors are almost certain to see it.

In regard to over-crowding at campsites, I can not say much as I have never felt that the backcountry sites I have used have been over-crowded. To require that all backcountry sites be reserved seems excessive. I would support a fee for the most heavily used backcountry sites, but I can not support one for all backcountry sites, as I feel many of them are properly used. I do NOT feel that I have ever been inconvenienced in any way for putting forth a permit to camp in the backcountry, and I can not understand why I should be required to pay such an excessive fee just to use an online reservation system that I am strongly opposed to in the first place.

The one part of the proposal that I support is a fee that will provide for increasing the amount of park rangers. However, I do not see why backcountry campers must be the sole ones to pay for this service, as it will benefit all visitors of the park. Although I think it is technically illegal to charge an entrance fee, I would support this over a backcountry camping fee.

The proposal talks about reducing "negative impacts to both the natural environment and to the visitor experience". If this is the case, why not charge horse users a fee, since they are largely responsible for wreaking havoc on trails and backcountry campsites? Or will the government continue to cater to rich people for the rest of eternity?



"PatrickJones_'sticks"
<stickspj@gmail.com>
08/02/2011 04:38 PM

To GRSMComments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Re: Backcountry campsite permit feedback

Superintendent
Comments
8/2/11

Thank You Melissa! I had a friend bring up that contacting Recreation.gov was useless because the people knew nothing of the park and it's trails. I do hope that the Backcountry Office continues to handle this important task.

Pat

On Tue, Aug 2, 2011 at 2:24 PM, <GRSMComments@nps.gov> wrote:
Hi Patrick,

Thank you so much for taking time to comment on the proposal. We appreciate your time and feel that everyone's comments are important.

You raised a question in your email, so I wanted to make sure and respond--Off trail permitting would be handled through the Backcountry Information Office, not Recreation.gov.

Respectfully,
Melissa Cobern

"PatrickJones_'st
icks"
<stickspj@gmail.com>
07/29/2011 09:27 AM
To
grsmcomments@nps.gov,
GRSM_SUPERINTENDENT@nps.gov
cc

Subject
Backcountry campsite permit
feedback

Using Reservation.gov to reserve sites

NO!!! I hate this system and I know others that feel the same about it. It is almost the solitary reason I don't stay in campgrounds that use it to reserve sites. It will make it difficult to plan trips because the system can not understand itinerary demands of a backpacking trip. It is software, not a human that one can involve in a conversation about alternative routes. All it understands is yes the site is full, no it is not.

This is a bonehead idea.

Having fees on daily backcountry usage

Again a resounding NO. You are attempting to take away the ability for some to afford a trip to the backcountry. Are you trying to create an elitist park where those that have money can backpack while that do not have disposable income can not?

This idea goes against the very concept of the creation of the National Park System!

Again, a bonehead idea.

I can understand the need to control backcountry usage and making all backcountry sites permit only is something that can and should be done at GSMNP. I have backpacked in National Parks that have 100% backcountry permit systems and the key to make this work is to have human interaction. I am one of those that that create several itineraries then walk in and work with the backcountry officer to create a trip. Reservation.gov will not allow this because it is just a software program. Do not take away the ability to create a trip of a lifetime, this idea will destroy the ability to create this trip.

Also what about off trail permitting? How is Reservation.gov going to handle this request?

Making all backcountry sites permit only? YES

Using Reservation.gov to reserve sites? NO! A THOUSAND TIMES NO

Charging fees for backcountry permits? NO! 100 THOUSAND TIMES NO

Our parks belong to We the People, not the politicians in Washington or

various 'well meaning' employees of the DOI.

Sincerely,
Patrick G. Jones

--
Pat



gmpmem@roadrunner.com

08/02/2011 09:23 PM

To GRSMcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject From NPS.gov: proposed campsite fees

Email submitted from: gmpmem@roadrunner.com at /grsm/parknews/bc-permit-restructure.htm

Mailing Address

Gary M. Aurand

7035 Township Road 319

Millersburg , Ohio 44654

Please do not seriously consider, or impose a user fee, no matter how small, for back country campsites. This is just another tax that always seems to be the answer to everything at the federal government level. This park is the "peoples" park. It is not the property of the Federal Government. It is owned by the taxpayers. Tens of millions of dollars are brought to this area every year by visitors from all over the world who come for peace and solitude, not to be hounded at every turn for more of their hard earned money. Perhaps new park management should be considered before asking for more money.



rapple@tateornamental.com
08/03/2011 09:28 AM

To GRSMcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject From NPS.gov: Backcountry Rangers

Email submitted from: rapple@tateornamental.com at /grsm/parknews/bc-permit-restructure.htm

I feel it would be great addition to have more backcountry rangers on the trails. I run/hike in the Smokies 12 months out of the year. I do see from time to time campsites which seem overcrowded. I've also seen trails which have had camp fires built in the middle of the trails. GSM is wonderful gift to all who visit. Anything which can help keep this park remain a treasure is welcomed. Rob Apple Murfreesboro, TN



Jeanie Hilten
<townsendsmcvb@gmail.com>

To <GrsmComments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

08/03/2011 01:01 PM

Please respond to
<jhilten@smokymountains.org>

Subject Backcountry user fee

Hello,

I think charging a modest fee for backcountry use is a good idea. Especially if it will enable more backcountry patrol.

Jeanie

Please use this email: jhilten@smokymountains.org

Jeanie Hilten

Special Events Coordinator

Smoky Mountain Convention and Visitors Bureau

7906 E. Lamar Alexander Parkway

Townsend, TN 37882

865-448-6134

865-273-1242 (direct line)

865-448-9806 (fax)

www.smokymountains.org



"Alan C. Morrow"
<amorrow@cbvnoi.com>
08/03/2011 04:26 PM

42
To GrsmComments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Fee for backcountry camping

Charging a fee is ridiculous to camp in the back country. There are absolutely no amenities and volunteers such as myself have to clean the trails. If you are going to charge fee then the park needs to do some much needed trail maintenance and clearing. The \$20 fee per night in the horse camps are absurd as well. There isn't even clean running water or bathrooms in the ones I have stayed at. I guess the next thing will be to charge people for even accessing the park. All of the money wasted on the elk should have went toward park improvements, not trying to introduce a NON-NATIVE species to the GSMNP.

-Alan Morrow



"tupi"
<tupi@tampabay.rr.com>
08/03/2011 07:03 PM

43
To <GrsmComments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject Comment on proposed Backcountry reservation fees

I would like express my opposition to the plan for a backcountry campsite reservation fee system.

Backpackers, in comparison to other users of the Park, have minimal impact. Instead of hitting this small group of people with fees, how about implementing a "special access fee" for visiting and using places like Cades Cove, Clingman's Dome, and even the very expensive visitor centers (charge \$1 or \$2 to view the film). With a fee structure such as that, additional staff could be put in-place to handle backcountry reservation telephone lines and provide additional park staff to enforce the existing reservation system. After all, the majority of the visitors create the largest impact and a substantial drain on the Park's finances. Think of all the trash hauled out of Cades Code, Clingman's Dome. Think of all the treated (or tested) water that must be supplied to the vistors in those areas and all the human waste that must be removed. These users currently pay no fees.

I do not like the idea of contracting jobs to a private company such as Recreation.GOV. This is a company that makes a profit from public land that the Citizens already pay to have set aside for their use and recreation. I realize they are the current provider for front country camping. We are just adding a middle man here and that adds additional costs. Their interest is solely to be profitable whereas the Park employees are interested in providing a good service, good experience, and education to the general public.

Please leave the no fee, current system in-place. Direct funds from new sources that can be obtained from high impact users, to rangers and/or Park personnel that can assist the low impact backpack hikers who usually do a good job of cleaning up after themselves and haul out debris left from careless day hikers.

John Wood

12969 90th Ter. N.
Seminole, Fl 33776

Bob Miller/GRSM/NPS
08/04/2011 08:20 AM

To GRSMComments@NPS
cc
bcc
Subject Fw: backcountry fees

Bob Miller
Management Assistant
Great Smoky Mountains National Park
(865) 436-1207
FAX 436-1204

----- Forwarded by Bob Miller/GRSM/NPS on 08/04/2011 08:20 AM -----



jennie freed
<jfintn@gmail.com>
08/03/2011 05:59 PM

To "Bob_Miller@nps.gov" <Bob_Miller@nps.gov>
cc
Subject backcountry fees

Mr. Miller,

Please do what you can to keep this from happening. I understand that more money is needed. I just think that pushing the cost off on the locals, some of which camp in the park almost every other weekend like me, would not be the best choice. I would not be able to afford that and would either stay home or camp elsewhere. This would further decrease visitors to the GSMNP.

There have to be hundreds of other ways to increase revenue. Some ideas:

- charge \$1 for every car from outside of east TN
- create a \$500 fine for dogs
- increase all currently paid campsites by \$1
- install ice machines at car camping locations at a premium
- reduce overlap of ranger hours in booths

I could provide more, but I am sure you get the idea.

Please keep this from impacting me and my three children and all the other locals like us.

Thank you,
Jennie Freed



kendwalker@charter.net

08/04/2011 09:15 AM

To GRSMcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject From NPS.gov: backcountry fees

Email submitted from: kendwalker@charter.net at /grsm/parknews/bc-permit-restructure.htm

Mailing Address

Kenneth Walker

209 W Crawford Ave

Monterey, TN 38574

USA

The fees do not concern me, what I worry about when I come to the smokies it is normally a day or so before that I plan my trip. Getting to the park I go to back country permit office to plan my hike, will I be able to do this under the new rules? Thank You.



BRIAN BARNWELL
<deerhunter8725@bellsouth.net>

08/04/2011 10:10 AM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry fees

I think the proposed reservation is a good idea and making all backcountry sites reservation sites is a great idea. I don't mind a small fee but not as much as a frontcountry site. A flat fee not per person. Charge more for horses. Horseback riders do more damage, leave more trash than regular backpackers. The fishing trails have more abuse than the others. I have seen people with no reservations, even no permits especially on Hazel Creek.



Marta
<marta_clark@yahoo.com>

08/04/2011 05:05 PM

47
To "grsmcomments@nps.gov" <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Fees for backcountry camping in the GSMNP

I am an avid backpacker and frequent visitor to the GSMNP. I live in Charlotte, NC, which is about a three-hour drive from the closest park access, and a longer drive from most of the other access points.

I have also hiked in several other national parks--Glacier, Yosemite, Kings Canyon, and Mt. Rainier--so I am familiar with how some of the other national park reservation and fee systems work.

First, I take issue with the assertion that many of the unreserved backcountry sites are crowded. I almost never run into crowds. Even on holiday weekends, I often have the sites completely to myself. I can only think of one time in the last seven years of making regular visits to the park when there was a crowd in an unreserved campsite, and it was a site only a couple of miles from Abrams Creek on Thanksgiving weekend.

So, in my opinion, there is no need for increased patrolling and permit enforcement in the vast majority of backcountry campsites.

My greater concern is that the registration and fee program would make the kind of weekend backpacking trip I do in the park impossible. In the other parks, hikers have to present themselves at one of the main visitor centers in order to receive their permits. Because of the structure of the GSMNP and the road layout, that would make it nearly impossible for me, and other hikers from NC, TN, and GA to make short trips in the park. If, for example, I had to drive from Charlotte to Smokemont, collect the permit, and then proceed to the trailhead, I would not actually have much time left on a Saturday to do any hiking. If all permits were issued at Sugarlands, the driving time would be so onerous that I would never be able to take a weekend trip again.

It also strikes me as strange that the cost of taking a short backcountry trip would quickly reach or exceed the cost of staying at a front country site, where campers have electricity and potable water and bathrooms and garbage collection.

All in all, I think instituting a paid reservation and permit system for ALL backcountry sites is a complicated solution to something that is not even a problem.

I realize that the park is underfunded. The problem I have with charging fees for backcountry camping is not the fees themselves as much as the cumbersome burden they would put on potential park user when planning a trip.

Marta Clark
627 King Edward Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28211
Sent from my iPad



"Philip Royer"
<philip.royer@asgarch.com>
08/05/2011 12:12 PM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc

Subject Proposed Backcountry Reservation System

History: This message has been replied to.

Dear Great Smoky Mountains National Park:

I have been using the GRSM backcountry reservation system since 1972, and in all that time my only complaint has been on the occasions when I did not call soon enough to get the reservation I desired. 8 to 5 access via phone 7 days a week works fine for me. Being from the area around the park and familiar with the Smokies, trip planning with the aid of park staff or volunteers has never been a service I needed. Even when I have visited distant parks, I have found that I can do an adequate job of planning if I take the time to do my own research. I admit that 24/7 access to reservations via the internet would be nice, but it seems that the cost of that service, paid by the NPS to an outside contractor, is too high.

When the park changed the system years ago, designating some campsites as rationed and others non-rationed, it opened the door to occasional overcrowding of a non-rationed campsite. I would simply propose to make all campsites and shelters subject to the reservation system once again. There have always been and will always be persons who refuse to use the reservation system. I suspect that adding fees to the reservation system will lead to even more reservation-less backcountry users.

While the notion of putting more rangers on the trails for education and enforcement is a laudable idea, I doubt that funding from reservations would be great enough to increase ranger presence in the backcountry appreciably.

The reservation fees used as examples in the proposal seem too expensive to me. I would not balk at paying a modest fee for a reservation, but I would want assurance that all of the fees collected from backcountry reservation would stay in the Smokies and be used for backcountry enhancements only.

Finally, I firmly believe that the spring Appalachian Trail thru-hiker period will overwhelm the proposed reservation system. I sincerely doubt that the average thru-hiker will be willing to pay for a reservation, and even if he or she does pay for a reservation, the itinerary will be altered at the hiker's whim. Even if all available slots in the shelters were given to thru-hikers, there is insufficient capacity for the numbers who enter the park every day in the spring.

Philip Royer
philip.royer@asgarch.com

Franklin Square
9724 Kingston Pike, Suite 703
Knoxville, TN 37922
(865) 470-9669 x 207
(865) 470-9628 fax



Johnny Molloy
<molloyjohnny@hotmail.com>

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

08/05/2011 12:38 PM

bcc

Subject Backcountry Permit Fee

Park Superintendent,

I am responding to the backcountry fee proposal, for that is what it is, a fee system to purportedly streamline the backcountry permit editing process.

First and foremost, I am concerned with what happens to the revenue generated by any backcountry fee system. Unless the entirety of the backcountry fees are put back into backcountry reservations, backcountry trail management and backcountry rangers I am completely against this proposal. Reason being, I believe the Great Smoky Mountains National Park would be targeting backcountry users for general park revenue simply because the backcountry reservation system is a portal by which they can channel users and make them pay a fee. The fact that Great Smoky Mountains National Park does not charge an entrance fee is a point of pride for this native Tennessean, since as part of the agreement to establish the park thousands of citizens pooled their money together to help by lands that became the park. Also, we must remember that these lands were once the homes of thousands of residents and their sacrifice should not be forgotten either. And that the park shall remain "forever free", means forever free and not until park personnel decide they need money for something.

Why don't you simply put quarter slot on bathroom doors at park visitor centers? Why don't you institute a fee for ranger programs? How about a fee for bicycling Cades Cove? How about a fee for entering an historic building? We know the answer. The public would become outraged. I am concerned that you all are targeting a limited group of backcountry users because you can; the permitting system provides the venue for revenue generation. And unless this money stays in the backcountry then you should look elsewhere for taxing visitors.

Background and scope of problem

I don't entirely agree with the background and scope of the problem part of your proposal. First off, of the parts 115 or so campsites and shelters less than 20% of them are anywhere near overcrowded. And current the reservation system addresses the most crowded campsites.

Proposed solution and outcomes

Pawning off the reservation system to an outside entity would absolve park personnel of an ongoing problem. I do agree that the party needs more backcountry rangers.

Under article 2 of this section shall propose to create a "cost recovery fee structure" to pay for the cost of reserving campsites and also to support an increased National Park Service presence in the backcountry information office and the parks backcountry.

Unless this is written in stone, and the monies generated cannot be shifted to some other "priority", then this proposal should be stopped.

And just because other national parks charge from \$10-\$30 per reservation does not make charging a similar fee right for the Smokies. For starters it goes against the "forever free" uniqueness that created the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Most

of these places, such as Rocky Mountain National Park and Everglades National Park are seasonal parks. Six months or more of the year these backcountry areas are completely deserted and unused. Locals such as myself use the Smokies year-round and going on multiple trips over multiple months over multiple years adds up to a lot of fees. If you want to eliminate the problem of overcrowding in the backcountry simply charge \$10 per reservation +5 dollars per person or some other number that is exorbitant and you will get rid of many backcountry users. As a student at the University of Tennessee I used to backpack in the Smokies often and simply could not have afforded the fees you propose to charge. Everybody that goes backpacking the Smokies is not a college graduate weekend warrior with a good job and money in their back pocket.

A less unreasonable fee structure would be five dollars per permit, such as is charged at the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area. Everglades National Park uses a reservation fee followed by a per night additional charge. Maybe you should consider talking to them and seeing how it works for them.

I do believe that when a fee is instituted backcountry use will decline. And we must ask ourselves what is the mission of Great Smoky Mountains National Park? Is it simply to preserve the resource or to allow visitors to see this magnificent park while having a minimal impact? Or do we want to discourage visitation? A fee will keep people out, and will solve the problem partly.

Also, If you do institute a fee system I think you should consider having an annual permit, whereupon locals can go frequently and not get stuck with these unreasonable fees every time.

One thing we all must remember is that no government agency inside the park service or outside ever has enough money. Every government agency always wants more money. I think we have a good coterie of volunteers in the backcountry as well as adopt a trail volunteers as well as groups like the Great Smoky Mountains Association, of which I am a member.

Conclusion

I think that once a backcountry fee is instituted it will never go down and will never go away, just like other taxes. And unless this money is unalterably set aside for the backcountry then I think it unfairly targets backpackers for general park revenue. Don't get me wrong. I love this park, but I remember how it was formed, by the citizens and purchased from citizens, many against their will, and I believe the backcountry situation is not such that we have to charge money to fix it. Overcrowded campsites are limited to certain shelters and sites and only at certain times of the year. Self-registration decreases the bureaucracy required to simply enjoy the backcountry.

Johnny Molloy

My qualifications are as follows:

I'm an outdoor writer with over 40 books, over 20 of which are hiking guidebooks. I'm very familiar with backcountry permitting processes throughout the United States, including national parks where I have written guidebooks, specifically for Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Shenandoah National Park, Mammoth Cave National Park, and Everglades National Park.

I have spent over 750 nights backpacking in Great Smoky Mountains National Park over a 30 year period and have stayed at every backcountry campsite in the park at least once. I am a native Tennessean and current Tennessee resident and am intimately familiar with the park.

www.johnnymolloy.com

Johnny Molloy
Outdoor Writer

"The wilderness is my office"
www.johnnymolloy.com



Andrew Sisson
<asisson655@gmail.com>

08/05/2011 01:41 PM

To GrsmiComments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry user fees article

Dear Superintendent;

I just read an article online through the Knoxville news about possibly charging a fee for the Backcountry camp sites. I am completely against this plan.

I have made plenty of reservations with the Backcountry reservation office with little difficulty. I have always found that the volunteers whom man this office and the Backcountry information office have been very helpful and knowledgeable. Also. The brown book Hiking in the Smokies book has a wealth of information about all the trails and sites in the book. I personally have not had any issues arriving at a Backcountry site and having unauthorized people at them. Part of the adventure going into the Backcountry is planning. With current resources like the brown book, national geographic map and park trail maps and the reservation office is more than enough information to plan a trip in my opinion. I feel that with a reservation system and fees in place you will then have even more ill prepared people in the Backcountry. Is this what the park service wants, to have more people who are not prepared for the Backcountry? More injuries and damage to nature and wildlife could occur.

I believe that there are many responsible backpackers like me whom follow the Backcountry rules. I make my reservation, and if there is no answer at the office, I keep trying until I get thru to talk to someone.

I am a member of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club, and enjoy the Backcountry in many different ways.

Please do not incorporate these proposed Backcountry fees.

Thank you.

Andrew Sisson
Marietta, GA
404-428-5442



Brian Cowell
<dr_cletis@hotmail.com>
08/05/2011 03:43 PM

51
To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc

Subject comments on proposed reservation fee structure

I have hiked in the GSMNP for over 20 years, and have also hiked in many of the backcountry-permit-fee parks in the Western U.S., so I am familiar with the current GSMNP system and the typical fee system out West. I have hiked about 3/4 of the trail miles in the GSMNP, and have seen a lot of problems. I think the proposed fee structure should be abandoned for the following reasons.

Duration of trips:

Most of the trips I have taken, and most of the trips my friends have taken in the GSMNP are one-night duration. A "long" trip in GSMNP in my opinion is a 3-night trip. In the Western parks, trips are very often a week or more. The cost of a \$10, \$20, or \$30 trailhead permit is much less significant if you are amortizing the trip over 7 or 10 or 14 days, instead of one night.

Unique aspects of GSMNP compared to Western parks:

Many if not most of the Western parks are trailhead access permits, not campsite permits. Camping is permitted anywhere that meets a reasonable and simple set of restrictions. This is a very different system from GSMNP system. In Yosemite and Sequoia/Kings Canyon, the surrounding area is all permit-only NFS land. One can enter through a surrounding area without paying the entrance fee for the park, or any camping fee, as long as the NFS permit is valid and in your possession. Again, GSMNP is a very different situation. A system for thru-hikers, not only AT-thru hikers but those hiking sections needs to be considered.

Penalizing those who are following the rules:

The proposed fees are consistent with the fees for camping in a campground, where there are legitimate costs for services, and do not reflect the significant difference in actual costs for maintaining the backcountry facilities. Many times we have hiked in several miles in the dark to a self-registration site simply because we were nearby and did not want to stay in one of the developed campgrounds. The proposed fee structure and system would eliminate such a possibility in the future.

If I want to stay in a restricted campsites, I wait to make reservations. This is the tradeoff. I typically don't bother, but rather stay in one of the unrestricted campsites. They are less crowded and generally better therefore. The proposed system penalizes those who prefer to stay in the less crowded (and thus, unrestricted, campsites), forcing them to pay to help support the restricted and crowded campsites.

If the no-action alternative is not pursued, please consider the following alternatives:

1. Make it applicable only during "tourist" season from Memorial Day thru Labor Day when overcrowding is an issue. I have NEVER had an overcrowding problem when hiking during the winter, the season when I hike the most. The rest of the year could continue with write-in reservations. Obviously, the problem alluded to in your proposal is that the funding from off-season hikers is needed to support the system, even though the system is not needed for the off-season hikers.

2. Enforce current fines and/or increase fines for violators. Violations for pets, overcrowding, failure to register, failure to follow food-storage, etc. are all enforceable in the front country. For example, you could force use of bear-canisters (easily enforceable at the trailhead). This would raise significant revenue, and also address the problem directly by addressing the violations.

3. Force registration in-person during certain hours. This system is certainly less convenient, but also fits with other solutions such as ensuring use of bear canisters. I am fairly certain that even with a

reservation, such in-person registration is REQUIRED at some western parks to ensure that proper equipment and permits are in the possession of the hikers.

4. Charge an entrance fee for the GSMNP overall, and make it like the rest of the parks. The number of people who "visit" by simply driving through and polluting the air and water is orders of magnitude higher than the number of hikers. Even with a \$1 entrance fee, the revenue would be much higher.

Thanks for considering my comments
Brian Cowell
Knoxville, TN



"Kurt A. Emmanuele"
<kemmanuele@baylor-school.org>

08/05/2011 08:58 PM

62
To grsmcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject backcountry fees

To whom it may concern,

Please do not institute backcountry fees for backcountry camping. It would be too expensive for my group of 6-7 students plus me when we use these sites for multiple nights on our educational trips. The current backcountry reservation system has worked very fine for us over the years because we have mostly refrained from using shelters and reservable backcountry sites.

I am not interested in ease of making reservations if it will be as costly as proposed.

Thanks,

Kurt E.



Ray Payne
<rpayne10@bellsouth.net>
08/05/2011 09:09 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc

Subject Backcountry Office & Permit System Restructuring Proposal

History:

☞ This message has been replied to.

Supt. Dale Ditmanson
Great Smoky Mountains National Park
107 Park Headquarters Rd.
Gatlinburg, TN 37830
8-5-2011

From Ray Payne

Following are my comments on the subject proposal

As a volunteer working in the Backcountry Office since 1995, and having hiked in the Smokies since 1957. I'm quiet familiar with many of the problems associated with hiking and backpacking in the Smokies. One of the major tasks of those of us who work in the Backcountry Office is helping to plan trips. Very often we are asked to do this over the phone or by persons who come into the office who

- a) Have no backing experience.
- b) Will be with a friend or friends that has no experience.
- c) Have no trail map in front of them as they talk on the phone
- d) Are in their vehicle on their way to the Park, on a cell phone, needing a trip plan and a reservation.
- e) Want to know how long it takes to get from point A to point B
- f) Want to know how far to a particular campsite from somewhere
- g) Arrive at the Backcountry Office at 4:30 pm, or the phone rings. (I work from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm and often well beyond 4:30 pm, not just 3 hours)
- h) Come from an area of the US that is flat as a desk top and think they can do 15 miles per day in the Smokies with a backpack.

And the list goes on.

Recreation.gov can't handle this and the Backcountry Office does not now and probably will never have 8 hour coverage, 7 days a week, by either volunteers or paid staff, which is badly needed.

Recreation.gov can collect a fee from those who bother to make reservations, but even now when no fees are required for camping the Smokies backcountry, many simply ignore the rules/regulation and go where they choose, or get a permit for a particular campsite and then go where they choose. My one experience with Recreation.gov (this year) was unsatisfactory when I made a reservation for a permit to enter the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCA) in the Superior National Forest. In 2009 and prior to that, I called the appropriate office of the Superior National Forest Office and had no problem. Reservations for specific campsites are not required (they are numerous, it's a 1,000,000+ acre wilderness area). The reservation is for a permit to enter the BWCA at a designated entry point on a specific date. Access points are relatively limited due to the road system in this area but in all probability illegal entry is still an issue. Many visitors to this area use an outfitter to take them to the entry point and the outfitter checks their permit.

The Smokies has numerous entry points and the use of outfitters is negligible. Why pay a fee when the probability of getting caught without a permit is negligible? In more than 50 years of hiking in the Smokies, I have met 2 Rangers on the trail, one of them very recently in the Greenbrier, the other many years ago on the AT. As the old saying goes, in the Smokies a rare and endangered species is "a Ranger on the trail".

From the information that I received on this issue it appears that the fees collected by Recreation.gov would be expected to pay for the additional staff required in the Backcountry Office and on the trails checking to determine if the backpackers are abiding by the rules/regulation, and paying their fee. I am extremely doubtful that the fees collected will be anywhere near the amount that would be necessary to fund the numerous paid personnel required to adequately staff the Backcountry Office and patrol the trails. To assure that the backpackers are paying their fees,

and camping at the site for which they have a permit will require virtual daily checking of the 105 backcountry campsites. A very short time ago a person came into the Backcountry Office from the Icewater Springs Shelter and reported that there were 27 persons at this shelter for which he had a permit on that night. The shelter capacity is 12 persons.

I realize that the current permit system for camping in the backcountry of the Smokies needs some major changes but am not convinced that requiring a reservation and a fee for camping at all of the 105 sites is the preferred change to be made at this time. On a trial basis, I suggest that starting a fee system applicable on a per person basis to the current 36 rationed sites and any that may be added in the near term, with patrolling frequently, but not on an every day basis. This would require additional funding by the NPS, but perhaps some of the funds from the Great Smoky Mountains Association and the Friends Of The Great Smoky Mountains National Park could be used for this purpose.

Ray Payne

email address <rpayne10@bellsouth.net>



"Ward, Barry G"
<barry.ward@bp.com>
08/06/2011 03:12 PM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject RE: Backcountry fee proposal

permits for years, the park is in the minority when compared to other parks with comparable backcountry operations. Most other parks with similar backcountry

operations charge between \$10 and \$30 per reservation, and many have additional per person or per person, per night fees. Parks use these fees in support of their backcountry

operations programs and, in turn, offer improved services to the public. Similarly, beyond providing access to a more convenient reservation/permitting service, Great

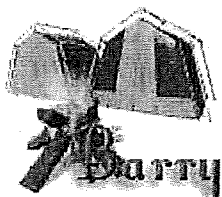
Smoky Mountains National Park proposes using these fees to increase ranger presence in the backcountry and improve customer access to trip planning services through the

Backcountry Information Office. Alternative fee structures that would allow the park to meet these objectives include:

- o \$10 per reservation ; or,
- o \$10 per reservation + \$2.25 per person per night; or,
- o \$4 per person per night.

3. Require reservations for all backcountry sites

I have been bringing my son up here every year for 10 years for an annual backcountry adventure. We have enjoyed visiting the Smokies each time and especially being able to explore and experience all that the Smokies have to offer for free. That freedom has allowed us to do more during our visit considering the high cost of fuel and other expenses to get there. Although I certainly understand the parks dilemma, I would not go from free as you go to pay as you go and do a "\$10 to \$30 per reservation, + \$5 per person charge just to go camping. However, I would not be opposed to a small fee for camping as long as it stayed affordable. The \$4 per person per night with no reservation fee suggestion would be reasonable and not such a shellshock to us that have been hiking the backcountry for so many years. I also think that only the sites that currently require a backcountry permit should be the only campsites that a fee should be charged.





Berny Klaus
<bernyklaus@gmail.com>
08/06/2011 03:48 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc

Subject Comments for Permit System Restructuring Proposal

I have reviewed the Backcountry Office and Permit System Restructuring Proposal published July 27, 2011. I have the following comments:

1. 1. You need to maintain the policy you have now that reservations can only be taken 30 days out from the start of the trip. I feel this is very important and a fair amount of time to allow for planning and this prevents sites booking up a year in advance. This should also now include a set time in EST on the 30th day out – so staying up to midnight to get your site is not needed. It used to be based on the 8am opening of the office and that should continue.

Yo 2. You need to ensure that the fee structure is all inclusive. I have dealt with Reserve America for state campgrounds – they publish a fee per night and at checkout, there is a \$7 or more “reservation fee”, etc. If it is going to be \$10 per permit, plus \$5 per person and I am going with one other person, I should pay \$20 – that is it, no other fees or taxes.

3. 3. Ensure the system allows the planning and booking of multiple site trips. After you build a trip on there, it should not tell you at the very last page a site in the middle of your itinerary is full and you must start over, etc.

In general, I agree with the proposal if the comments above are included. I have never stayed at a non-reservation site in GSMNP, but from your proposal, I can see how that could be a problem.

I have used reserved sites in the past though. I did have trouble making the reservations sometimes. I have also seen dogs on the trails. Please publish the effective date of this new program as early as possible. Also, please ensure to the best of your ability that the majority (75% or more) of this fee goes back to park and not the contractor.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Berny Klaus

Louisville, KY



SJM Travels
<sjm.travels@yahoo.com>

08/07/2011 06:09 PM

Please respond to
SJM Travels
<sjm.travels@yahoo.com>

To "GrsmComments@nps.gov" <GrsmComments@nps.gov>

cc:

bcc

Subject Backcountry camping changes

To Whom It May Concern:

The proposed changes to backcountry camping in GSMNP are not thru-hiker-friendly in the least. Having to either visit a far-off visitor center when hiking into the park via the Appalachian Trail is ridiculous and there is no guarantee of phone service to make a reservation for one of the shelters. How exactly is a thru-hiker supposed to print their reservation paper? The worst of all of this red tape is that if a thru-hiker were to navigate all of these hurdles and actually acquire a reservation, there is a good chance that once they reach their shelter, there will be quite a few people already there without a reservation, exceeding the capacity of the shelter, and where will the rangers be?

It's ridiculous. It's cumbersome. Thru-hikers should not have to make reservations, because there is no guarantee they will arrive at a particular shelter on a particular day. Leave the reservations to the visitors who drive into the park and limit backcountry access from the trailheads.



"A Walk in the Woods"
<erik@awalkinthewoods.com>

08/08/2011 01:00 PM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject proposed backcountry fees

Hello,

Our entire staff at A Walk in the Woods not only welcome this proposed change but are very excited about them! We are happy to pay more to fund backcountry rangers and are also looking forward to tighter regulations in the beautiful and worn backcountry. Too often we have come upon people abusing the resources, too many people at a tent site or shelter, folks cutting down trees to burn, burning garbage, leaving food out, feeding wildlife, bringing dogs on the trails (claiming they are service dogs and laughing about it), etc. Not all the problems will go away of course, 800 miles is a lot to patrol, but with fees and required reservations at all sites, the issues will certainly be mitigated.

Vesna and Erik Plakanis
Owners A Walk in the Woods
A Walk in the Woods
<http://www.awalkinthewoods.com>



"Earnhardt, Sean"
<SeanEarnhardt@EuropaSports.com>

08/08/2011 04:38 PM

To "GrsmComments@nps.gov" <GrsmComments@nps.gov>
cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry Fee for AT Thru Hikers

I've recently heard about the idea to charge Thru-Hikers a fee. I'm not yet a Thru-Hiker, but I'd like to do so one day. I do think that it would be a shame to charge individuals for use of the park. I am a yearly visitor and I've also heard that there have been discussions to charge vehicles to enter the park as well.

In these trying economic times, that would just be one more reason to stay somewhere closer to home. When will the government, be it local, state, or national, stop passing the buck to the people they are actually trying to get to patronize things like state and national parks?

I understand the logic in charging those that actually use something, as opposed to those that do not. For instance, If I lived in Nashville and never visited GSM NP, I would not be happy knowing that a great portion of my taxes went to the park. It's the, "let those that use it, support it" concept. However, hikers that are passing through on foot from North Carolina? Do they not have a big enough task before them? Even if they do not make the entire hike, is it so important for the government to get thirty extra dollars from their pockets?

Personally, I'd be willing to bet that the people with money to spend are vacationing in Gatlinburg, Pigeon Forge, Cherokee, etc. Why not add a 1% Hotel/Motel/Restaurant tax. I'm pretty sure 1% in those cities would be MORE than enough to cover what a \$30 thru-hiker pass would cost.

I realize there is no one right answer and that everyone will have an opinion. I just think taxing more people less money is a better solution than taxing less people more money. That is, unless you want to see those few people start choosing to bypass that part of the trail all-together. I would think it wouldn't be that difficult to just stay to the east of GSMNP and create a great trail through NC.

I thank you for listening to and reading my thoughts on the subject.

Sincerely,
Sean Earnhardt
searnhardt@aol.com



korbec@comcast.net
08/08/2011 08:40 PM

19
To GrsmComments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Charge low entrance fee on EVERYONE that uses the park
instead of a minority of people that back country camp

I have a great ideal! Instead of making money off the small amount of people that hike and camp, charge an entrance fee. That way everyone pays and you can charge a lower fee on EVERYONE that uses the park. That being said, I am going to break out the maps and find some alternative hiking/camping sites just in case you decide I should pay to back country camp while you encourage bus loads of people to drive around to feel like they have had a grand adventure.

John Elliott



scottcundiff@aol.com
08/09/2011 10:34 AM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov
cc billnapper@gmail.com
bcc
Subject Proposed Back Country Fees

As a backpacker/hiker, I feel as if this proposed fee unfairly singles out the ones who are truly utilizing the backcountry in a way that has the least amount of impact on the park resources. Thousands of automobile tourists pose the greatest threat to the parks environment and increase the demands for added expenses, therefore, they should be the first group to be hit in their pocketbook, not backpackers.

Why not implement a fee for those who are most responsible for increased operating expenses and their detrimental impact (even if unintentional) to the park's resources, the Automobile Tourons..

A resounding "NO" to proposed backcountry fees!
Respectfully Submitted,
Scott Cundiff
Shepherdsville KY



"Chris Martin Intertek"
<chris.martin@intertek.com>
08/09/2011 10:57 AM

61
To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject Permit system restructuring proposal

Dear Mr. Ditmanson,

Do not start charging hikers for backcountry permits!

Education and awareness-raising, **NOT** increased regulation and commercialization, is the answer to negative environmental impacts caused by ignorant hikers.

Bringing a private contractor or any additional fee collecting/enforcing entity into the National Park runs counter to our goal of keeping the wilderness wild! Please consider other alternatives (such as allowing dispersed camping) to address the problems of overcrowding.

Regards,

Chris Martin
Future AT thru-hiker

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This email may contain confidential or privileged information, if you are not the intended recipient, or the person responsible for delivering the message to the intended recipient then please notify us by return email immediately. Should you have received this email in error then you should not copy this for any purpose nor disclose its contents to any other person.

<http://www.intertek.com>



marsha delk
<elmotoots@hotmail.com>
08/09/2011 01:10 PM

62
To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject Back country sites

Hi

Just a note to tell you that as a user of the backcountry sites in the Park, I support the Fee system proposed.

If all the moneys generated from the reservation system for back country sites would be used for extra Rangers, or direct support for back country sites. I would support the higher Fee charges. I would love to see more Rangers in the back country.

If most of the money is to be used in front country areas, I would prefer to see the lower fees.

I would also like to see a PER PERSON AND PER HORSE camper fee charged.

I do support the fee system.

Steve Delk
Indiana



Tony Thomas
<tony.thomas@gmail.com>

08/09/2011 01:52 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry Permits

To whom it may concern,

I just read an article concerning the backcountry permit process in the GSM NP. The article states that one of the proposed changes is that reservations for backcountry sites would be required even for AT thru-hikers. This concerns me because I'm in the middle of making an itinerary for my thru-hike next year. I understand how the current system works. I'm just wondering how I will be able to make these reservations when there is no certainty if I'll be sticking with my itinerary? And will thru-hikers have priority at backcountry sites? It just doesn't seem so if the system goes on-line.

This is my first thru-hike and I don't want to feel deterred if I have no place to sleep in GSM NP.

Please reassure me by telling me how this process will work.

The article I read can be found here:

<http://www.dailyhiker.com/news/will-backcountry-permits-great-smoky-mountains-np-be-changing/>

Regards,
Tony Thomas



Bernard Martin
<martinhjr@yahoo.com>

08/09/2011 03:14 PM

Please respond to
Bernard Martin
<martinhjr@yahoo.com>

To "grsmcomments@nps.gov" <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Site reservations proposal

To Whom It May Concern,

While I can understand the reasoning behind adding a reservation system to all backcountry sites in GSMNP, I feel this will not help eliminate current problems with these sites. In my years of backpacking in this area I have found, primarily, two types of backcountry hikers. The first type is a moderate to frequent hiker who knows the rules and follows them. Unfortunately, they seem to be mostly avoiding the park (except for thru-hikers) because of the second group, the sudden (my term) hikers. Sudden hikers visit the park and are suddenly consumed with the idea of hiking out into the forest and spending the night. They are not concerned or versed in the rules of backpacking in the park.

Many of these hikers will wind up at a current reservation site without a clue about the site designation. I have personally witnessed this several times. Making all sites reservation-only sites will not change this behavior. Rather than charge rule-following hikers for all sites/enforcement, would it not be more cost-effective to erect another set of bear cables to accommodate sudden arrivals? This would also have the benefit of accommodating extra rule-following hiker(s) who, for one reason or another, could not make it to their designated site that night. What happens if a rule-following hiker stops at a different proposed reserved site because of one problem or another? Will he/she be fined for intruding on another "reserved" site? There are too many variables in a backcountry trip to make all sites mandatory (reserved).

In closing, I would like to suggest alternatives to making all sites reservation-only along with the fees and added bureaucracy that follows. For starters, add more bear cables to heavily-used sites. A simpler approach to fee collection would be to issue annual Park backpacker permits for \$20. These permits would be available online or at ranger permit stations. Issuing these permits would help fund extra bear cables and enforcement of already mandated reservation sites. Lastly, clearly mark the current reservation sites as such with a wooden sign attached to the camp-number sign.

Thank you for your consideration

Regards,

Bernard Martin Jr



"L. Perry Fuqua Jr."
<wappo_pete@me.com>
08/09/2011 03:21 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc

Subject Charging fees for Backcountry Camping

Dear Mr. Ditmanson,

This is my opinion about the proposal to charge fees for backcountry camping in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park: it stinks of foul play! Yes it would be a good idea to find funding for rangers who would be dedicated to patrolling the backcountry, they have been needed for a long, long time. However the people who camp at backcountry sites don't just do so for the scenery. Some do it because they are poor and cannot afford front country camping. They carry a heavy load on their backs to be able to be in these mountains for longer than a day hike.

I know it is impossible to charge an entrance fee for all visitors, not only due to covenants, but also it would be infeasible to have employees at all of the 20+ entrances into the park to collect money or check annual or day passes already purchased. Also the highway between Gatlinburg and Cherokee is a public road, not a toll road.

Although it is not a popular option with many people, I suggest that once you are in the park you are in the park without an entrance fee, but you could charge everyone a daily (or annual) fee to drive the Cades Cove Loop. After all, about one third of all visitors go to Cades Cove and by charging just a dollar or two to "drive" around the cove could generate more than enough revenue for several backcountry rangers and other desirable projects as well. It might reduce traffic loads a little bit since some people would turn around rather than pay the fee. You could include daily passes to the cove in the price of the daily camping fee for the Cades Cove Campground. You could still close the road for half a day two days a week (like you already do) for cyclists and hikers and not charge them an entrance fee.

To me charging a backcountry fee for camping and/or a fee to drive around Cades Cove are just the same: charging someone for the privilege to access a particular part of the mountains. Yet the difference is the amount you would be charging per person and the total revenue expected. I think people would be tickled to death to pay \$1 as opposed to \$15.

You are expecting a few thousand visitors to bear the burden for funding said rangers, when, in my opinion, you should be charging 2-3 million a petty amount instead.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

L. Perry Fuqua Jr.



"Steve Silberberg"
<steve@fitpacking.com>
08/10/2011 07:46 AM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Reservation System Proposal Comments

I would like to comment on the Backcountry Reservation System Restructuring Proposal. I represent Callipygian Ventures, Inc., an annual Commercial Use Authorization holder that typically runs a single weeklong backpacking trip within Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

1. I am in total agreement that all backcountry sites be on a reservation system.
2. I am very concerned about the number of days ahead of time that backcountry sites will be reservable. For example, if I cannot reserve a site more than 30 days (or even 90 days) prior to the trip, I will be unable to advertise a trip to potential clients with any certainty of itinerary. As you can imagine, this will have a great impact on my business.
3. I also agree that a fee be imposed for backcountry use.
4. The proposed fee structures all favor different types of groups. For example, one favors a smaller sized group and another favors a short term group. I am unsure what you will ultimately choose, but I already pay \$560 as a commercial operator just to get a permit. So for a weeklong trip with a group of 8, the \$4 per person per night fee would cost \$224 more. That seems like an awful lot. I would rather pay \$10 per reservation (if you consider 7 different sites 1 reservation) plus \$5 per person, which would come out to \$50, which is much more manageable.

To recap:

Make reservable sites available for reservation FAR in advance, say 6 months
Have a few different fee options so that one type of use (shorter trip, group size, etc) is not favored over another. Allow those reserving sites to choose the most economical plan.

I'd like to comment more, but I'm about to hit the trail for the next few weeks and have no other ability to comment.

Thanks,
Steve Silberberg
Callipygian Ventures, Inc.
steve@fitpacking.com
<http://www.fitpacking.com>
781-773-1115



Nell Fuqua
<nrfuqua@hotmail.com>
08/10/2011 10:34 AM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject FW: Charging fees for Backcountry Camping

Mr. Ditmanson,

My brother sent you this comment yesterday and I just want to add my "ditto." If we're talking about funding and reasonable fees that don't burden anyone, I think this is a great solution. If your goal is to inhibit backcountry camping altogether then the proposed \$15 fee would do it. However, you would have to first hire the rangers to enforce the rule and then lay them off when the revenues didn't show up.

thank you,

Nell Fuqua

> Dear Mr. Ditmanson,

>

> This is my opinion about the proposal to charge fees for backcountry camping in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park: it stinks of foul play! Yes it would be a good idea to find funding for rangers who would be dedicated to patrolling the backcountry, they have been needed for a long, long time. However the people who camp at backcountry sites don't just do so for the scenery. Some do it because they are poor and cannot afford front country camping. They carry a heavy load on their backs to be able to be in these mountains for longer than a day hike.

>

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>

> Although it is not a popular option with many people, I suggest that once you are in the park you are in the park without an entrance fee, but you could charge everyone a daily (or annual) fee to drive the Cades Cove Loop. After all, about one third of all visitors go to Cades Cove and by charging just a dollar or two to "drive" around the cove could generate more than enough revenue for several backcountry rangers and other desirable projects as well. It might reduce traffic loads a little bit since some people would turn around rather than pay the fee. You could include daily passes to the cove in the price of the daily camping fee for the Cades Cove Campground. You could still close the road for half a day two days a week (like you already do) for cyclists and hikers and not charge them an entrance fee.

>

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>

> You are expecting a few thousand visitors to bear the burden for funding said rangers, when, in my opinion, you should be charging 2-3 million a petty amount instead.

>

> Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

>

> Sincerely,

>

> L. Perry Fuqua Jr.

>
>
>
>
>
>
>



kevin dillon
<dillonk@gmail.com>
08/11/2011 11:30 AM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry Office and Permit System Restructuring Proposal

There are a few major issues I see with the intended restructuring plan, the most egregious involves the use of the contractor via recreation.gov to "improve customer service". Recreation.GOV suffers from a number of issues, the least of which is a lack of knowledge about the areas for which they issue permits. Although it may not make much difference for a site in a campground, a number of issues could complicate a groups use of a backcountry site. Furthermore, as seen in Californias, Yosemite NP permitting of Halfdome, allowing online permitting creates an economy of resalers on sites such as craigslist, selling coveted permits for outrageous fees.

No recreation.gov employee can replace the advise and information given by a park ranger. No online process can match the saftey information diseminated in the office by a ranger at the time a permit is picked up and validated. Allowing park users to book and print a backcountry permit without ever meeting face to face with a ranger, with the intent spending the night in a area of limited access and high danger is to dangerous. The fees proposed would be better used hiring dedicated office and backcountry staff with the experince required to ensure the publics saftey. The people in the most danger are the ones who will find it the most convient to get a permit online.

--

Respectfully Submitted,

Kevin Dillon
dillonk@gmail.com

"The vast possibilities of our great future will become realities only if we make ourselves responsible for that future." (Pinchot)



ggm2020@comcast.net
08/11/2011 02:04 PM

69
To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Back Country

We won't be able to attend your meeting Aug. 16, but want you to know that we are supportive of a fee based reservation system for campsites.

It has been unfair to thru hikers when others have camped without the prior reservation. And then there are hikers like the group from GA that every year has camped at campsite # 17. When you drive that far, a couple dollars more is not a factor.

Glenn Marshall

865/856-5708



"Bryan E. DeLay"
<bedelay@charter.net>
08/11/2011 04:50 PM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry Permit Fees

Park Superintendent,

In response to the backcountry permit fee proposal, the initial concept in creating the Great Smoky Mountains National Park was for the park to be "forever free". This simply means the park should be free forever, not until the government decides to increase revenues by creating a new tax.

Having hiked all 900 miles of trails in the park at least once and having backpacked too many nights in the backcountry to count, other than at shelters, I've never encountered crowded campsites or problems in the backcountry. Also I feel that the current registration and reservation system addresses most of the issues with small and frequently used campsites.

Further it's doubtful that fees generated from backcountry permits will be used strictly for maintaining backcountry campsites and trails. More probable is that these fees will go into the general revenue fund of the park and maybe even the general revenue fund of the federal government. With an estimated 9,000,000 people visiting the park each year and with an estimated 80,000 backpackers each year, why should such a small group be targeted with fees to enjoy the park.

Based on the above I am absolutely opposed to backcountry fees in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. If this proposal is actually implemented, and with so many other places to backpack in east Tennessee and western North Carolina, my visitation to the park will be reduced dramatically. Thank you for the opportunity to comment regarding this proposal.

Bryan DeLay



"Richard 'Rick' Lippert"
<richard.lippert@gmail.com>
08/11/2011 11:08 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Comments Regarding Backcountry Office & Permit System
Restructuring Proposal

To Whom It May Concern;

I am a concerned United States citizen that actively uses the Great Smoky National Park's backcountry, as often as my schedule permits. Please find included below a number of comments regarding the proposed Backcountry Office & Permit System restructuring, based upon reading the NPS document posted online at:

<http://www.nps.gov/grsmv/parkmgmt/upload/BC-Reservation-Restructuring-Proposal.pdf>

1. Park management is to be applauded for turning its attention to the issues that can arise in obtaining a backcountry permit, especially during peak seasons.
2. It is commendable to have an objective of placing NPS rangers into the backcountry in greater quantities. Having traversed the GSMNP's backcountry for extended periods of time with my permit at the ready, should an inquiring ranger want to verify I was in the right place with the proper documentation, but never encountering a single NPS ranger during any of my outings - this is a good move.
3. The decision to make all backcountry camping sites available only on a reserved basis, while a very big departure from the standard now in place, is understandable. Having personally experienced both the overcrowding situation at non-reserved sites and an issue that could have quickly escalated to an emergency level status if 'luck' was not journeying along with us, the ability to have a more complete and accurate accounting of who is out in the backcountry is another solid move.
4. The proposed fee schedule appears to be within the same guidelines as those used by the Forest Service, and while no one likes the idea of having to pay more for something that once was 'free', in the quickly changing world we find ourselves this simply a fact of life. Park management appears to have attempted to turn this whole issue into a win-win proposition, trying its best to make lemonade out of lemons.

So, at the onset I am very optimistic about the good things this proposal has to offer. However, please accept these two additional cautionary comments:

1. It is my hope that should this proposal actually be implemented there would be some type of iron-clad commitment regarding the funds being generated to help offset this reallocation of resources. Such a commitment would be to prevent such funding from ever being diverted away from the stated purpose used justify this restructuring and to convince folks like me it is worth the monetary trade off. This could be in the form of a commitment of xx% of NPS ranger staff in

the backcountry at all times during designated times of the season. It would be a travesty to have this influx of new found revenue not funding its intended purpose.

2. While the use of online reservations offers what may appear as a fairly sterile solution for 80% of the public serviced by NPS within the GSMNP in this area of permitting, it does not come without a number of challenges. Key is the opportunity for potential abuse, such as being experienced by the NPS in other parks throughout the U.S. and having gained attention by many within the national press (United Press International: http://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2011/04/18/Park-service-clamps-down-on-scalpers/UPI-34211303163213/). It is hoped Park Management will have a well defined check & balance system to insure scalping of permits and campsite reservations is in place BEFORE this proposal is ever implemented. Having to use Craigslist to bid for my permits in the future, would simply be a lousy trade-off for the current system no matter how broken it is or and how good the restructuring process intentions were!

Since I travel a fair distance to visit/use the Park, it will not be possible for me to attend any of the planned informational open houses. However, should there be any additional information you could make available to me it would be greatly appreciated. I will continue to monitor the NPS website for updates.

Best wishes as you move forward in making your final decisions and plans. Should you have any further questions of me, do not hesitate to let me know. You may email me at richard.lippert@gmail.com or call me Mon-Fri 8am-5pm at 407.598.1500.

Regards,
Richard (Rick) Lippert

1096 Rainer Dr., Ste 1001 · Altamonte Springs, FL · 32714 [[map](#)]
Office: 407.598.1500



krzyjo2863@aol.com
08/12/2011 12:58 PM

72
To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry Fees

To Whom it May Concern:

I am a backcountry camper and I am not totally opposed to a fee but.....it would hinder ALL of our trips with reservations!! We would no longer be able to hike at our own pace (we would HAVE to make it to our site or risk a fine) Once we made the reservations at 3 camp sites our plans could NEVER change!! In the backcountry things change ALL the time (storms, creeks too high to cross, blowdowns etc...) and I am sure there would be NO REFUNDS!! I don't understand why you would have to make a reservation at a site that doesn't get used very often. It would also hinder our last minuit trips. I guess what I am trying to say is...I am not opposed to a fee as long as it is FAIR and what I have read so far it does NOT sound FAIR to me.

~~Thank You!~~

Jo Neuspickel & family
8195 Hwy 467
Williamstown, Ky 41097
859-824-0259



"L. Perry Fuqua Jr."
<wappo_pete@me.com>
08/12/2011 02:25 PM

13
To Dale Ditmanson <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc

Subject Public Comment Period should be two phase

Dear Mr. Ditmanson,

When I was a District Conservationist with USDA we always provided a series of at least two separate public comment periods, separated by several weeks, to, allow people with vested interests in our proposals in order to accommodate farmers who might have conflicting schedules, to make sure they were given ample opportunity to attend. Your two meetings are almost back-to-back and don't seem to allow ample time for the small group of backcountry campers (and others) to arrange to attend. I think it would be fantastic if you would reconsider. Furthermore I believe it in the best public interest if follow-up meetings were held after your analysts have had a chance to review all the first round of comments, so you can tell the public what the analysis is and if your plans have been revised. Then the public could comment one last time before your final decision is made.

The last rush to camp in the backcountry will just about be over by the end of October, and winter gives a breathing spell on implementation. So why not extend the public comment period. Why rush it now? We, the hikers and campers, are a small group, and right now from comments on discussion boards about this topic on White Blaze and GoSmokies it seems many feel their input will be ignored. Many feel this public comment period the NPS is allowing is just for show. It may be by the letter of the law, but is it in accordance with the intent of the law?

So I implore you to think about what I have said here. It would at least show everyone the NPS is really wanting to listen to the people who love and enjoy the backcountry, the front country, the roads, day hikes, vistas and every other part of this wonderful treasure.

You have my email address, and I hope you will respond directly to my request.

Sincerely,

L. Perry Fuqua Jr.
wappophotos.com



krzyjo2863@aol.com
08/12/2011 02:28 PM

To GRSMCOMMENTS@NPS.GOV
cc
bcc
Subject Fwd: Backcountry Fees

-----Original Message-----

From: krzyjo2863 <krzyjo2863@aol.com>
To: krzyjo2863 <krzyjo2863@aol.com>
Sent: Fri, Aug 12, 2011 1:34 pm
Subject: Re: Backcountry Fees

What if we came off the mountain early, would we get a refund?? (this has happened to us twice) What if it got dark on us and we couldn't make it to our site and we had to stay at a different one?
I am not opposed to a yearly fee but keep the non-reserved sites the same.
What about the DAYHIKERS?? I think they trash the trails more than the backpackers.
What about HORSES?? I think they damage more trails than backpackers.
I understand once you fill out the permit now it can't be changed (we have never done that anyway) but what if we end our trip early?
As far as plans changing, the last time we camped in the backcountry we didn't decide on what trail and site we would stay at until we got down there, with the reservation system we wouldn't be able to do that.
Thanks again!!

-----Original Message-----

From: krzyjo2863 <krzyjo2863@aol.com>
To: grsmcomments <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
Sent: Fri, Aug 12, 2011 12:58 pm
Subject: Backcountry Fees

To Whom it May Concern:

I am a backcountry camper and I am not totally opposed to a fee but.....it would hinder ALL of our trips with reservations!! We would no longer be able to hike at our own pace (we would HAVE to make it to our site or risk a fine) Once we made the reservations at 3 camp sites our plans could NEVER change!! In the backcountry things change ALL the time (storms, creeks too high to cross, blowdowns etc...) and I am sure there would be NO REFUNDS!! I don't understand why you would have to make a reservation at a site that doesn't get used very often. It would also hinder our last minuit trips.
I guess what I am trying to say is...I am not opposed to a fee as long as it is FAIR and what I have read so far it does NOT sound FAIR to me.

Thank You!

Jo Neuspickel & family
8195 Hwy 467
Williamstown, Ky 41097
859-824-0259



darrylroe@computer.org
08/12/2011 02:55 PM

15
To GRSMcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject From NPS.gov: National Park Managers Consider
Backcountry Camping Changes

Email submitted from: darrylroe@computer.org at /grsm/parknews/bc-permit-restructure.htm

Mailing Address
Darryl Roe
1217 Walnut Branch Lane
Knoxville, TN 37922
USA

I am emailing you in support of the changes you are proposing to the backcountry permitting system. While I certainly don't relish the thought of having to pay more for camping in the backcountry, I feel that it would be worth it, especially if it results in additional enforcement patrols. I have especially noticed problems with pets in the backcountry and overcrowding at some of the campsites. Thanks- have a good day.



John Quillen
<johnquillen@comcast.net>
08/13/2011 10:05 AM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc

Subject No to backcountry tax reservation system

I am writing to express my opposition to the proposed backcountry reservation fee system. This represents nothing more than a tax on backcountry use. A fraction of the stimulus money which was misappropriated to repair horse damaged trails could solve this problem as it would only take two employees answering phones that are NOT volunteers to take the strain off good folks who donate their time. It makes me reconsider any volunteer work I may do in the future when I see park leadership engage in fee grabbing at the expense of the one group that cares most for this natural resource. Therefore, I wish to have my position clearly marked in the NO category with regard to this proposed backcountry fee.

John Quillen
3701 Lancaster Dr
Knoxville, TN



MacDonald Andrew John
<dancewithandrew@gmail.com>
m>

08/13/2011 11:05 AM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject no back country tax

no back country campsite tax.

it's unfair, illegal, and a disservice to the people who worked tirelessly to make the Great Smoky Mountains National Park a reality.

Period.



MICHAEL MCMURRAY
<mjmc49@bellsouth.net>

08/13/2011 11:31 AM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Backpacking Tax

78

Sir! The idea of funding your park operations with a fee for back country camping is first and foremost unfair. We as back country campers have the least impact on the park as a whole. Please reconsider this! If you want to single out a group that damages park trails and back country sites, look no farther than equestrians. Regards, MJ McMurray



Daniel Walters
<danielhwaltersmd@mac.com
>

08/13/2011 02:33 PM

19
To "grsmcomments@nps.gov" <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject

Dear Park Superintendent:

I am writing to convey my opposition to your proposed back country use fee. No matter how you try to dress this pig up, this is a tax on those of us who enjoy the land in the Smokies. Your were given large sums of tax dollars through the stimulus package, you should better allocate these funds so that you can properly fund all necessary functions of the park, without taxing us, the park patrons twice.

You should expect a lawsuit concerning this matter if you choose to ignore common sense and the Charter the park was found upon.

Sincerely,

Daniel H. Walters, M.D.

Sent from my iPad.



Lisa
<margxpq19@gmail.com>
08/13/2011 08:24 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc

Subject Back Country Tax

For the consideration of The Park Superintendent:

I am writing simply to state my opposition to the proposed "Back Country Tax." I do not feel that ~~this tax~~ is fair or appropriate.

Thank you for your time.

Lisa Margle



Eric Graves
<graveseric5@gmail.com>
08/14/2011 12:31 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Back Country Tax

Superintendent Ditmanson,

I am writing to express my opposition as well as outrage at the proposal to tax back country campers. Yes, I said tax. Let's call a spade a spade. This is a tax and the American people are fed up with taxes! I say NO to this onerous and excessive taxation and obvious back door end around to charge entrance fees in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to its least politically powerful user group.

You say you need a better reservation system. Bull hockey! The system has worked fine every time me or my friends have used it this year, last year, and the years and years before! You say you need more rangers in the back country. Funny, it seems I meet rangers on the trail as often as 50% of the trips I take into the back country. You say you need fees for trail and campground maintenance. I know good and well, most of the back country maintenance is done by volunteers and users like myself and the friends with which I hike and camp, who fix things if we can and always pick up any trash left behind by careless users and hike it out!

To those of us who actually utilize the park, your arguments just don't hold water. We see this scam for exactly what it is! Don't tax me twice for using the Park (I pay my federal income taxes every April) or try to charge me an entrance fee counter to the Park's charter just because I don't enjoy the fruits of a large and powerful lobby in Washington.

It is apparent you have chosen to saddle the smallest and least represented Park user group with a tax/entrance fee because you've figured out a way to skirt the Park's charter and face the least amount of public resistance while so doing. Disgusting...

You can smear all the lipstick you want on this pig's snout; I ain't about to kiss it!

Sincerely,

Eric Graves
Knoxville, TN



Jon Livengood
<humunuku@gmail.com>
08/14/2011 06:07 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject backcountry fee

Hello, I am writing in regard to the proposed backcountry camping fee in the park. Below are my responses to the main drivers to this fee:

1. Reservation system - yes, a fee will allow an online reservation system, but is this system going to support making reservations up to the day of the trip? If not, there will need to be an backcountry office at every ranger station in the park so spur of the moment backpacking trips can reserve their camp sites, else would someone camping near Twenty Mile need to stop at park head quarters before the trip? That is going to either cause a lot of unneeded driving, or cause someone to just camp without a permit. (fyi: I've never had an issue with the current backcountry reservation system...sometimes the phone is busy, but I always can get through and get my reservation after a few tries)

2. Backcountry rangers - The only way that they can help control the un-permitted camping and trash problem at campsites is to have a lot of them. I think I heard that there would be at least two of them...it would truly be impossible for 2 or 3 rangers to make the difference the fee is trying to accomplish. I would guess that in peak season, you would need to have many rangers (excess of ten), to provide the level of service that a fee demands, Unless there is a real presence of backcountry rangers-a fee is only going to increase the un-permitted camping (e.g. compare it to running a red light...people do it all the time and seldom get caught...but install a red light camera and people will stop...the only way to make people stop breaking the law is to give the a very high likely hood of being caught)

other issues to think about

Thru-hikers - there are three long distance trails passing though the park (AT, BMT, MST). It would be very hard and limiting to make the thru hikers plan their hike while they are in the park. The guys and girls need to have freedom to go further or shorter than what they though they could do days earlier...too many factors to deal with - weather, fatigue, gear issues, injuries/sickness, loud shelter mates, etc... they need flexibility.

Horses - horses do much more damage to trail, and honesty, the horse friendly campsites in my experience usually have the most trash. If there is a fee, it needs to be higher for horse campers.

Local users - If you choose to have a fee, there needs to be a yearly pass for local/routine campers in the park....people won't be able to afford to pay \$10-\$15 a night for many nights....

What I suggest:

If you really want to improve the park, and fund the reservation system and backcountry rangers (**so both can be effective**) , I suggest charging a fee to drive on the Cades Cove loop. A \$2-\$5 fee for each car on the loop (keep it free for bike, walkers and shuttle buses) would generate a whole lot more revenue AND decrease air pollution, decrease noise pollution, decrease traffic and congestion.

The Cades Cove fee would provide the most bang for the buck...it would really improve the park experience for everyone. Charging a fee to Backcountry campers is only going to provide minimal improvements, possibly some negative effects and potentially keep more people off the trails.

Thank you

Jon Livengood
3123 Dow Drive
Knoxville TN 37920
813-464-4662



deamons
<deamons@bellsouth.net>
08/14/2011 07:41 PM

43
To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry Useage Fee

I'm sending this email to voice my opposition to the proposal to charge backpackers a fee to stay in the back country and have decided that Superintendent Ditmanson intends to augment his already bloated budget by taxing us backpackers while funneling the stimulus money to build roads and repair horse trails . There is no level upon which this represents any semblance of fairness. Just 5% of that stimulus money could have employed two more back country office workers to man the phones which would solve the whole problem. The idea of a back country tax is wrong and there should never be a fee for use of a back country campsite in the GSMNP. Smokies land was donated by private entities and the US govt wants to make more money off us because by charter, they are not allowed to charge an entrance fee. Supt Ditmanson took millions of stimulus tax dollars to build roads and fix horse trails, now he wants to take more of our money to strengthen his empire. Isn't that what tax dollars are for in the first place, to support the park?

Dave Ammons,
Louisville, TN



William Howe
<willhowedvm@gmail.com>

08/14/2011 07:46 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry fee proposal

To keep this short: I vehemently oppose this idea. I have had extensive experience in other parks that use such a system and find that it greatly degrades the entire experience I seek in traveling into the backcountry in the first place. It is NOT about the money (although I am sure you do not believe this for a second), but is rather about the "feeling" one gets when they are allowed to travel into the backcountry after simply filling out a registration card and heading out.

As so eloquently stated in A Walk In the Woods, one of the most amazing things about the Appalachian Trail is that the entire 2160 miles is completely free (an extreme rarity today). Do we really want to be the only 70 miles of it which no longer are an expression of freedom.

Dr. Will Howe
2196 Watkins Road
Talbott, TN 37877
willhowedvm@gmail.com



Marcus Simpson
<marcus@pol.net>
08/14/2011 10:22 PM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc

Subject Backcountry Office and Permit System Restructure Proposal

While I support the proposals for improving the backcountry permit system, there is one additional area that I would urge you to consider, and, hopefully, establish an effective mechanism to address the situation.



A number of individuals conduct natural history research in the Park under the established procedures and permits for such work. Certain projects require access into the backcountry and/or the use of shelters. Unfortunately, current rules regarding use of these shelters often preclude or seriously impede the conduct of field work that is necessary for the investigation.


A recent example of this situation would be my work on the spread of Swainson's Thrush as a nesting bird in the southern Blue Ridge Mountains. My wife and I have been involved for some years with monitoring studies for the range expansion of Swainson's Thrush and Hermit Thrush (see attachment above for Westphal et al., Chat v 72). As part of this long term research, I obtained a permit a few years ago for work within the Park (see "GSMNP application" attachment above). Mt. LeConte was among a number of sites that needed to be surveyed. Unfortunately, the rules stipulate that one cannot stay at the Mt. LeConte shelter for more than one night, regardless of whether "vacancies" are available on sequential nights. While I was given the option of reservations on alternating nights, assuming that such openings were actually available, this is not a viable choice due to the effort, time and distance involved in hiking in and out every other day. This restriction also affects access to other shelters in areas of interest. As a result, I was unable to continue the work and terminated my Swainson's Thrush research in the Park (see Investigator Annual Report above). I had intended to apply for other projects involving Saw-whet Owl, warblers (Yellow-rumped, Magnolia, Swainson's), etc. but have since opted not to pursue these subjects.

I would suggest that a process be established by which an investigator, as part of their "approved" project status, could request multiple sequential reservations at a particular shelter if this were an essential requirement for conducting the research. I expect that such requests would be rare and that justifying circumstances would be equally rare. The process could involve review and approval by one of the senior park staff involved in research administration. Such approval would include criteria and restrictions on the type and amount of equipment that could be brought and guidelines/limitations on the number of days that would be necessary to remain at a particular site. I appreciate the obvious issues of having a shelter functioning as a field lab --- not desirable or intended here!

Thank you for your attention to this suggestion.

Marcus Simpson
Wake Forest University Health Sciences (retired)

 Westphal et al Chat v72 n4 p 126 2008 Catharus.pdf  Investigator Annual Report Swainson's GSMNP 2010.pdf

 GSMNP application Swainson's Thrush research.pdf



reese snyder
<reese306@gmail.com>
08/15/2011 12:28 AM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject NO BACKCOUNTRY TAX

I strongly oppose any new tax, but this one is ridiculous. The people that use the backcountry trails and campsites are the people that care about the park the most, and they are the people that volunteer their time to improve the park. No backcountry fees



"Britt Harris"
<brittharris@fcbtn.com>
08/15/2011 09:21 AM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject no tax on backcountry

As a twenty five year veteran hiker I oppose any tax that may be forced upon us.

Britt Harris
Loan Officer
First Century Bank
1780 North Broad St
Tazewell, TN 37879
(423) 626-1713 (O)
(423) 526-9720 (C)
(423) 626-1914 (F)

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"Nora Wolfenbarger"
<nora@volknit.com>
08/15/2011 09:58 AM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject Back Country Tax Proposal

Dear Park Superintendent,

Please note our disapproval of your proposal to charge a back country tax to charge a reservation fee for those campsites.

It is not fair to tax the people who are truly enjoying the Park.

Nora Wolfenbarger
Volunteer Knit Apparel, Inc.
403 Old Knoxville Highway
New Tazewell, TN 37825
(423) 626-8000



"John Harrell"
<john.harrell@summitviewhm.
com>

08/15/2011 10:07 AM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Back Country Tax?

Dear Superintendant,

I have recently been informed that there is a proposal to tax or charge a fee for Back Country Camping. Surely this is only a proposal and is not something that is seriously being considered. Imposing a fee on Backpackers is not your solution to raising money to benefit the Park. It would be such a small percentage of monies that it would hardly matter.

Beside the fact that there is really no avenue for revenue with this fee, how can it be fair? I just spent the weekend camping in the Park and I only came across 2 other people at the camp site. So my party of 7 (which included 4 kids ranging in age from 8-14) and one other couple is supposed to pay a fee, when on the other hand the 8 hikers who were traveling the AT and didn't have to pass via a "toll bridge" do not have to pay. Is the intent to have a Ranger collecting tolls on the trails or just to the visitors who are entering the Park via Rangers Stations? There seems to be plenty of opportunity in merchandising and inflated prices already at the Park's Stores(Cades Cove Campground Grocery) rather than exploit the limited numbers, in the grand scheme of things, that are actually using the Backcountry. Are you going to charge a fee for Day hikers too? What about the Scenic overlooks and Quite Walkways?

As I left the Park Saturday afternoon, I noticed the number of people taking advantage of the FREE sites, our great park has to offer. Several of these families were there solely because of the ability to have a fun, rewarding, educational, and memorable inexpensive vacation. If a tax is imposed, Park Visitor numbers will drop.

Earn the respect of everyone and look at it historically. Go out and solicit private donors, recruit volunteer hiking clubs, challenge scouts, hold fundraisers, do something other than taking the easy path. If fact, that is what we told the 4 kids that experienced their first overnight Backcountry camp this weekend, " If it was easy, everybody would be doing it." They all were ready to come back again.

Don't take the easy path, it doesn't lead to the places that matter.

John Harrell



"Bill Tribble"
<wgtribble@aol.com>
08/15/2011 10:12 AM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc "Bill Tribble" <wgtribble@aol.com>
bcc
Subject GSMNP Fee System

GSMNP,

I know that a Fee system is a difficult topic to consider. Items for consideration could be as follows:

- Make all sites in the backcountry rationed, only, IF
- The process can be properly monitored and managed. Also the system must be fair and equitable to ALL.....
- I do not feel adding one or two rangers is enough to manage this system to properly cover the backcountry.
- The backcountry campers that are going by the rules and are paying their fees, must see the rangers in the backcountry enforcing the penalties to those that are abusing the system. If not, there will be rebellion.
- AT Through Hikers should be waved from fees and/or reservations. There is too much of a need of "flexibility" for these hikers than to tie them down to this type of a "rigid" system.
- How about consideration of a "fee system" that charges a flat fee based on the size of the group, only. (Big South Fork uses this type system). The difference would be the limitation of the # of campers @ group in the GSMNP (8 or 12, depending on the site). A suggested fee structure for the GSMNP could be as follows (regardless of the # of nights):
 - Proposed for GSMNP:
 - 1-2 campers: \$5
 - 3-4 campers: \$10
 - 5-8 campers: \$15
 - 9-12 campers: \$20
 - Big South Fork System (currently):
 - 1-6 campers: \$5
 - 7-12 campers: \$10
 - 13-18 campers: \$15
 - 19-24 campers: \$20
 - 25-30 campers: \$25
- If there is a "fee" system, I would want to be assured the money is going to the backcountry, not into a general budget.
- For the locals (defined by "frequent use and/or residence location") is there consideration being given to a "annual pass" vs a "per trip" fee. If not, otherwise, the system could become costly.

Thanks for your consideration!

Also, thanks to all GSMNP employees that work to protect OUR Park,

Bill Tribble
AAC – Volunteer

C-865-258-3503



Matthew Timbs
<matthew.timbs@gmail.com>

08/15/2011 10:26 AM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry Permits

I read that the park is considering charging fees for backcountry reservations. I would like to voice my opposition to the Backcountry Office & Permit System Restructuring Proposal submitted on July 25, 2011.

--Matt



"Philip Royer"
<philip.royer@asgarch.com>
08/15/2011 10:30 AM

To <GRSMComments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject RE: Proposed Backcountry Reservation System

History: This message has been replied to.

Hi, Melissa,

I hope I did not sound too contrary. The more I thought about the issue, the more I realized that I never really had any complaint of the current system, and I never experienced overcrowding at a non-rationed campsite, although I am sure that it happens occasionally. However, I can sympathize with out of town visitors who wish for a more robust backcountry office and 24/7 reservations. In the end, I decided to make the comments reflect my own personal experience. Sorry you are the one who has to read all that stuff.

In contrast, I would favor an entrance fee for the Smokies, but I know that is a "third rail" issue, and even if approved, the money would not stay in the Smokies.

Philip

-----Original Message-----

From: Melissa_Cobern@nps.gov [mailto:Melissa_Cobern@nps.gov] On Behalf Of GRSMComments@nps.gov
Sent: Monday, August 15, 2011 10:16 AM
To: Philip Royer
Subject: Re: Proposed Backcountry Reservation System

Hi Philip,

Just wanted to let you know I received and read your comments. Thanks so much for taking time to submit them.

Melissa

"Philip Royer"

<philip.royer@asg
arch.com>

To

<grsmcomments@nps.gov>

08/05/2011 12:12

cc

PM

Subject

Proposed Backcountry Reservation
System

Dear Great Smoky Mountains National Park:

I have been using the GRSM backcountry reservation system since 1972, and in all that time my only complaint has been on the occasions when I did not call soon enough to get the reservation I desired. 8 to 5 access via phone

7 days a week works fine for me. Being from the area around the park and familiar with the Smokies, trip planning with the aid of park staff or volunteers has never been a service I needed. Even when I have visited distant parks, I have found that I can do an adequate job of planning if I take the time to do my own research. I admit that 24/7 access to reservations via the internet would be nice, but it seems that the cost of that service, paid by the NPS to an outside contractor, is too high.

When the park changed the system years ago, designating some campsites as rationed and others non-rationed, it opened the door to occasional overcrowding of a non-rationed campsite. I would simply propose to make all campsites and shelters subject to the reservation system once again. There have always been and will always be persons who refuse to use the reservation system. I suspect that adding fees to the reservation system will lead to even more reservation-less backcountry users.

While the notion of putting more rangers on the trails for education and enforcement is a laudable idea, I doubt that funding from reservations would be great enough to increase ranger presence in the backcountry appreciably.

The reservation fees used as examples in the proposal seem too expensive to me. I would not balk at paying a modest fee for a reservation, but I would want assurance that all of the fees collected from backcountry reservation would stay in the Smokies and be used for backcountry enhancements only.

Finally, I firmly believe that the spring Appalachian Trail thru-hiker period will overwhelm the proposed reservation system. I sincerely

doubt that the average thru-hiker will be willing to pay for a reservation, and even if he or she does pay for a reservation, the itinerary will be altered at the hiker's whim. Even if all available slots in the shelters were given to thru-hikers, there is insufficient capacity for the numbers who enter the park every day in the spring.

Philip Royer
philip.royer@asgarch.com

Franklin Square
9724 Kingston Pike, Suite 703
Knoxville, TN 37922
(865) 470-9669 x 207
(865) 470-9628 fax

No virus found in this message.
Checked by AVG - www.avg.com
Version: 10.0.1392 / Virus Database: 1520/3835 - Release Date: 08/15/11



"Rod Harris"
<jennrod@hughes.net>

08/15/2011 10:35 AM

Please respond to
"Rod Harris"
<jennrod@hughes.net>

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject NO TO BACK COUNTRY TAX!!!

NO ADDITIONAL TAXES ON THE BACK COUNTRY / CAMPSITES / BACKPACKERS... IN OUR NATIONAL PARKS WE PAY ENOUGH TAXES TO SUPPORT THE PROGRAM, GET WITH THE BUDGET ... DO YOUR JOB!

RODNEY E HARRIS

1469 Highway 438,
Centerville, TN 37033-3716



Matthew Timbs
<MTimbs@vocera.com>
08/15/2011 10:36 AM

To "grsmcomments@nps.gov" <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject: Backcountry Office and Permit System Restructuring
Proposal comments

To whom it may concern...

I am very opposed to the idea of charging fees for backcountry reservations. Use of backcountry sites has been steadily declining for the past decade or more. Charging additional fees for backcountry reservations will not only further decrease usage, but will be a hindrance to those of us who live near enough to enjoy the backcountry on a regular basis, not only for the issue of money but (more so) an issue with hassle of having to make online reservations, print them, etc.

I believe that this program will cost more than it brings in (revenue wise) and will NOT be policed. I have never seen a ranger in the backcountry. I have never seen an ranger anywhere except the main road or an office/campground. (To be fair, I have heard that ridgerunners spend time on the A.T.)

--Matthew Timbs



Clark Allison
<r.clarkallison@yahoo.com>
08/15/2011 10:43 AM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject back country reservation fees (tax)

Dear Park Superintendent,

Where did all the stimulus money go to? Regardless of the stimulus money ~~this is a bad idea.~~
I am a regular visitor to the park and my understanding was when the park was created it was to
have no admission fee. This constitutes one in my opinion.

Thanks
Randolph Allison



Karen E
<kentz54@yahoo.com>

08/15/2011 11:15 AM

Please respond to
Karen E
<kentz54@yahoo.com>

To "grsmcomments@nps.gov" <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry

Okay, Rick Perry, you just got my attention. Stand by your statement, "I will work hard to make government as inconsequential in your life as I can!" Go Rick. the country works so much better when the government is OUT OF OUR LIVES!

I will be sending this on to all my women and Mom groups and you will be hearing from them because we are totally engaged since "2008" We are awake and will keep up the pressure until we make things RIGHT! Woman have a instinctive sense when things are going horribly wrong and cut thru the BS to "get 'er done!"

k



"Seaver, Donald M (APHIS)"
<Donald.M.Seaver@aphis.usda.gov>

08/15/2011 01:10 PM

To "grsmcomments@nps.gov" <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc "Pete Shepherd (hwls@cox.net)" <hwls@cox.net>

bcc

Subject Backcountry Charges for GSMNP

Increasing the presence of rangers, alleviating overcrowding and stopping illegal camping are changes that should be made to the current backcountry experience. I first camped in the Park (Eagle Creek) in 1979 and we were visited daily by a ranger who checked our permit and made sure we moved from a site after 4 days. The campsites allowed us to experience "wilderness" as we saw no other people and there was little evidence of habitation at any of the sites. Our fishing licenses were also checked on a daily basis. Contrast to my trip to Hazel Creek in 2008 where we never saw any NPS presence in 5 days of camping and found the campsites from Bone Valley to Saw Mill overrun with people, pets and trash. When I contacted the Park Headquarters upon returning to register my dismay, I was informed that rangers were infrequently in the backcountry or on patrol general as Outreach and Education were the current mandates of the Superintendent.

While I am not averse to paying a reservation fee for backcountry sites (provided some are left as walk-ups), I feel that charging an entrance fee (\$25/7days is the going rate at western parks) is the more appropriate first-step to instituting a fee structure in GSMNP. The current fiscal climate in Washington means the noose will continue to tighten around the NPS budget and user fees must be charged. Utilization of the park will not decline with an entrance fee and much need infrastructure updates and patrol hours can be funded.

GSMNP is still one of the most beautiful areas in North America and we should all feel a sense of responsibility for preserving and protecting it through user fees.

Don Seaver
Staff Scientist - Citrus Health
USDA/APHIS/PPQ/CPHST
Raleigh, NC 27606
919-855-7448



"J. MARK DUTTON"
<jmdlaw@yahoo.com>

08/15/2011 01:11 PM

To "grsmcomments@nps.gov" <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Opposition to park use fee proposal

To whom it may concern:

It has come to my attention that there is a movement in place looking to begin charging a fee for various park activities and the like. I would like to voice my opinion opposing this. I believe that charging fees for being allowed to go camping on our National Park is unconscionable. One of the most unique things about backpacking the AT is that the entire 2000+ miles is free to camping. Please keep it and the remainder of the park free for all to enjoy without there being a fee for it's use.

John Mark Dutton,
Attorney At Law
PO Box 990
Jasper, AL 35502
(205) 471-5245

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Harrison Marshall
<harmar@mindspring.com>

08/15/2011 02:00 PM

Please respond to
Harrison Marshall
<harmar@mindspring.com>

To grsmcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry office & permit system restructuring proposal

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal. If we can get through to the Backcountry office and make reservations, my daughter and I will be backpacking through the Cataloochee Valley in October.

Proposed solution No. 1 - Contract with Recreation.gov.

I strongly support being able to reserve backcountry spaces using an online reservation system. While I have no personal experience with Recreation.gov, I always reserve camping spaces in North Carolina state parks using their online system. At present I have the date marked a month in advance of our planned backpacking trip in order to start calling the Backcountry office. An online system would be much, much more convenient for simple reservations. I'd prefer to speak to the office only for trip planning and informational purposes.

Proposed solution No. 2 - Create a cost recovery fee structure for reservations

I strongly support some form of cost recovery as long as a majority of funds are used to increase backcountry staffing and to enhance the backcountry experience, including trip planning. In my particular case the fee would be for either one or two people. Both the terms "per reservation" and "per night" are used in the alternative fee structure description, so I'm not certain whether "per reservation" affects moving from one camping spot to another.

While in Cataloochee our goal is to spend one night each at two different sites. If that constitutes one reservation covering two nights, the first alternative would cost me \$20 (for 2 people), the second \$20 (for 2 nights) while the third would cost \$16. Under this definition of reservation = trip I'm fine with any of the proposed fee structures.

However, if reservation = site then the first and second alternatives would cost me \$30 (for 2 sites) while the third would remain \$16. While I'm all for supporting increased services through user fees, the first two alternatives would be heading into cost prohibitive, with the result of our backpacking more in national forests and state parks but less in the Smokies. However, my assumption is that reservation = trip is the definition proposed.

Proposed solution No.3 - Require reservations for all backcountry sites

For the most part I support this idea, although this shouldn't apply to the AT through the Park, and perhaps that isn't part of this proposal.

When my parents first took me up Mt. Leconte in 1963 when I was 5 it wasn't difficult to reserve a cabin. This is the second year in a row of being unable to get a reservation during my daughter's school break. Now that she's in a year round school with breaks in April and October we may be able to get up there. My point being that in the past it used to be fairly simple to get away from crowds by walking more than a mile and/or going uphill but now even the backcountry can be crowded. While I don't yet see any reason to limit the number of day hikers on trails, there are many good reasons to limit the

number of backcountry campers.

Again, thank you for providing the opportunity to comment on these proposals.

Harrison Marshall
105 Spring Cove Drive
Cary, NC 27511
919-264-7360



Rick Stowe
<stowe.rick@gmail.com>
08/15/2011 04:42 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Proposed backcountry tax

As someone that enjoys spending time in the park I feel that this is incredibly unfair. As recent college grad I think of all the trips I took with buddies to the park because we were broke college kids and that was cheap recreation we could always remember. If there had been a tax then we definitely wouldn't have come to the park. Please do go through with this tax as it will most definitely hurt public opinion of the park.

Thank you for your time.

--

Rick Stowe



Roger Nielsen
<rogerganielsen@gmail.com>
08/15/2011 06:17 PM

101
To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Comments re: Backcountry Office & Permit System
Restructuring Proposal

Mr. Dale Ditmanson, Superintendent
Great Smoky Mountains National Park
107 Park Headquarters Road
Gatlinburg, Tenn. 37738

RE: Comments about "Backcountry Office & Permit System Restructuring Proposal"

Dear Sir:

Please find the attached Word document containing my written comments about the backcountry fee and online reservation proposal. Thank you for the opportunity to submit these written comments and suggestions.

Sincerely,

Roger G. Nielsen, ATC & BMTA
270 McDuffie Drive
Athens, Ga. 30605
(706) 201-7192



GSMNP fees.doc

Aug. 15, 2011
Mr. Dale Ditmanson, Superintendent
Great Smoky Mountains National Park
107 Park Headquarters Road
Gatlinburg, Tenn. 37738

101 cont.

RE: Comments about "Backcountry Office & Permit System Restructuring Proposal"

Dear Sir:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these written comments about the Great Smoky Mountains National Park's backcountry fee and online reservation proposal. As a regular visitor to GSMNP backcountry campsites (25 overnight or multiple-day visits over the previous five years), please allow me to make the following comments and suggestions about the restructuring proposal.

The proposal to implement an online registration system through Recreation.gov, combined with placing every backcountry campsite on a reservation-only basis and adding a reasonable cost recovery fee sounds logical. I support those plans, especially given the highly impacted condition of many backcountry sites and the badly eroded condition of many of the park's trails.

No matter what level of user fee you implement, however, I strongly advocate appropriating a portion of the revenue for trail repair and maintenance. I strongly oppose implementing a flat fee for all backcountry users; instead, I suggest you consider using a sliding scale based on the level of impact various kinds of use has on the resource. I find the proposed fee structure a bit expensive and would encourage you to consider implementing the lower-cost version of \$4 per person per night for backpackers, plus adopting something on the order of \$10 per horse per night and \$4 per rider per night for equestrians to help compensate for their larger impact.

Besides introducing and distributing exotic plants (plantain and white clover, for example), equestrians cause a disproportionate level of impact on virtually all trails. Horse-use intensifies erosion on steep trails (e.g., upper Bote Mountain Trail), creates wallows that feral hogs enlarge (e.g., Mount Sterling Ridge Trail) and hastens the deterioration of trail berms as riders and hikers skirt trail chasms and mud bogs.

In summary, I support an online reservation system coupled with a reasonable user fee to pay operating and backcountry patrol costs. However, please strongly consider setting aside a portion of the revenue for trail and site maintenance and implementing a tiered fee structure based on how much impact different users have on the resource. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the GSMNP permit system restructuring proposal.

Sincerely,

Roger G. Nielsen, ATC & BMTA
270 McDuffie Drive
Athens, Ga. 30605
(706) 201-7192



David Skidmore
<dskidmore@pdknox.org>
08/15/2011 03:06 PM

102
To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Back country fees

I'm writing to oppose the institution of fees for use of the backcountry. It is inconsistent with the charter by which the park founded on also. Backcountry campers are the the most conscientious users of the park resources, and also the ones that represent the smallest portion of the people who use the park. You will not make any money that will justify the rationing of those campsites that will result from that. I am a dedicated backpacker who moved here, among other reasons, to enjoy the backcountry opportunities that the GSMP offers; this will take away the freedom that exists in the backcountry to a great degree.

This communication may contain information that is confidential and/or protected by the attorney-client privilege and/or attorney work product doctrine. It is intended for receipt and use solely by the individual named above. If you are not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that any disclosure, distribution, copying or taking of any action in reliance on the contents of the electronically transmitted materials is prohibited.



Bill Alexander
<bill@appraisalco.com>
08/16/2011 01:08 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc

Subject Backcountry Fee

I am writing in opposition to the Backcountry Office & Permit System Restructuring Proposal. This proposal is not fair to those who enjoy backcountry camping in the GSMNP. Below are a few points I would like to make.

- Since many areas can't be reached without overnight stays, this is in effect an entrance fee which is not to be charged in the GSMNP. A legal opinion from the courts may be necessary.
- No fee is being imposed on those who demand the most services and create most of the park's expenses. Why don't you charge a per horse fee? Anyone who uses the trails is aware that horses do most of the damage yet get most of the services. Backpackers have very little impact.
- Many of those who backpack are younger and can least afford additional fees. But, no one needs additional costs during a recession.
- The proposal to add more rangers is simply to police the new rules you are seeking to impose. It's not to serve the backpackers, it's about collecting \$\$\$ and charging fines. I see little need for more rangers.
- The requirement to make all site's reserved will negatively affect those of us who live nearby and often make plans on short notice depending on weather and other factors. There is no reason most site's should be reserved. Shelter's already require reservation as do the most frequently used sites. Instead of making all sites reserved, the park service should be considering adding more camp sites since they are few and far between in many hard to reach areas. This would help reduce overcrowding without more regulation, not that there is really an overcrowding problem anyway.
- What happened to all the stimulus \$\$\$? I have not seen evidence that any went toward backcountry improvements. Instead, the park service repaved roads that didn't need repaving and spent \$\$ on those who drive around creating pollution. Some of this money should have been used for additional help answering questions and other needed services such as security at parking areas.
- I would much prefer to the same level of services with no fee or reservation system.

Please reconsider your proposal to prevent future legal action.

Sincerely,

Bill Alexander
Knoxville, TN



"William Van Horn"
<wavh@email.dnet.net>

08/16/2011 02:44 PM

Please respond to
<wavh@email.dnet.net>

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc <msommerville@appalachiantrail.org>,
<philip.royer@asgarch.com>, <lsberns@att.net>,
<rich.daileader@wellsfargo.com>

bcc

Subject Backcountry Office and Permit System Restructure Proposal

Great Smoky Mountain National Park
ATTN: Park Supervisor (Re: Backcountry Office and Permit System Restructure Proposal)
107 Park Headquarters Road
Gatlinburg, TN 37738

August 16, 2011

Dear Sir:

My wife and I are writing you about the Backcountry Office and Permit System Restructure Proposal. We live in Franklin, NC and are members of the Nantahala Hiking Club (one of the 31 AT maintaining clubs) and life members of Appalachian Trail Conservancy. We are very active volunteers with ATC. I was recently selected to serve on ATC's Stewardship Council and my wife is Co-chair of The Trail to Every Classroom Advisory Council. We have volunteered several times as AT Ridge Runners in the GSMNP from 2007-2009. We are AT section hikers and have completed over 1300 miles, usually 30 days at a time.

We fully agree with the need to increase staff at the backcountry office, increase backcountry presence and have a reservation system for all backcountry sites. All would help to protect the resource we all love. We are not against the idea of a user fee. We believe those that use the resource should be required to pay a fee. As the Federal budget decreases we realize this will be come more and more important. We hope you are looking at a day user fee system for the frontcountry visitor.

We are greatly concerned with how thru-hikers may be impacted by any restructure. Our experience is that thru-hikers do not know their schedule far enough in advance to make reservations. Once on the trail they cannot easily access internet and phone service to make a reservation (which would still be a guess). Again, our experience shows on some days during the peak of thru-hiker season up to 50 hikers a day enter the park from Fontana Dam (Paid ridge runner historical data can provide exact numbers). We believe it is very important not to impact the thru-hikers' schedule and if you must, to the least amount possible. Case in point, where the AT ridge runners have worked to space the thru-hikers out between Camp site 113 and Spence Field shelter on their first night in the park.

I think your park definition of a thru-hiker (a hiker starting at least 50 miles outside the park) is a good one. Request you look at continuing the self registration at Fontana Day and Davenport Gap. Have the thru-hiker fill out whatever form is required and drop the required fee in the box. Use the AT ridge runner and backcountry ranger presence to spread hikers out and fill the shelters first (present practice). Additionally, construct tent pads based on usage history at Mollies Ridge, Russell Field and Spence Field to limit resource impacts. A second, but more intrusive alternative would be to hold a lottery system at the southern entrance of the park for the number of

spaces reserved for thru-hikers. Most thru-hikers by this time would be able to sort out among themselves the spaces based on their hiking ability (CS 113 to Spence Field). Our concern with this is that if you limit the number, to say 6, at the four locations there are days when you will stack hikers up south of the dam.

We are willing to participate in further discussions to reach an appropriate balance between the resource and its many users that meets the needs of today and preserves the resource for the future.

Bill Van Horn

Sharon Van Horn

45 Pine Hill Road, Franklin, NC 28734
828-369-1983
wavh@dnet.net

Sent via the WebMail system at email.dnet.net

Great Smoky Mountain National Park
ATTN: Park Supervisor (Re: Backcountry Office and Permit System Restructure Proposal)
107 Park Headquarters Road
Gatlinburg, TN 37738

August 16, 2011

Dear Sir:

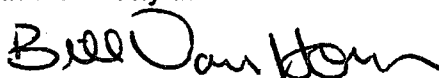
My wife and I are writing you about the Backcountry Office and Permit System Restructure Proposal. We live in Franklin, NC and are members of the Nantahala Hiking Club (one of the 31 AT maintaining clubs) and life members of Appalachian Trail Conservancy. We are very active volunteers with ATC. I was recently selected to serve on ATC's Stewardship Council and my wife is Co-chair of The Trail to Every Classroom Advisory Council. We have volunteered several times as AT Ridge Runners in the GSMNP from 2007-2009. We are AT section hikers and have completed over 1300 miles, usually 30 days at a time.

We fully agree with the need to increase staff at the backcountry office, increase backcountry presence and have a reservation system for all backcountry sites. All would help to protect the resource we all love. We are not against the idea of a user fee. We believe those that use the resource should be required to pay a fee. As the Federal budget decreases we realize this will become more and more important. We hope you are looking at a day user fee system for the frontcountry visitor.

We are greatly concerned with how thru-hikers may be impacted by any restructure. Our experience is that thru-hikers do not know their schedule far enough in advance to make reservations. Once on the trail they cannot easily access internet and phone service to make a reservation (which would still be a guess). Again, our experience shows on some days during the peak of thru-hiker season up to 50 hikers a day enter the park from Fontana Dam (Paid ridge runner historical data can provide exact numbers). We believe it is very important not to impact the thru-hikers' schedule and if you must, to the least amount possible. Case in point, where the AT ridge runners have worked to space the thru-hikers out between Camp site 113 and Spence Field shelter on their first night in the park.

I think your park definition of a thru-hiker (a hiker starting at least 50 miles outside the park) is a good one. Request you look at continuing the self registration at Fontana Day and Davenport Gap. Have the thru-hiker fill out whatever form is required and drop the required fee in the box. Use the AT ridge runner and backcountry ranger presence to spread hikers out and fill the shelters first (present practice). Additionally, construct tent pads based on usage history at Mollies Ridge, Russell Field and Spence Field to limit resource impacts. A second, but more intrusive alternative would be to hold a lottery system at the southern entrance of the park for the number of spaces reserved for thru-hikers. Most thru-hikers by this time would be able to sort out among themselves the spaces based on their hiking ability (CS 113 to Spence Field). Our concern with this is that if you limit the number, to say 6, at the four locations there are days when you will stack hikers up south of the dam.

We are willing to participate in further discussions to reach an appropriate balance between the resource and its many users that meets the needs of today and preserves the resource for the future.




Sharon Van Horn

Bill Van Horn
45 Pine Hill Road, Franklin, NC 28734
828-369-1983

wavh@dnet.net
Case 3:13-cv-00116-TWP-HBG Document 39-4 Filed 05/07/14 Page 131 of 279
MAKE SURE YOU USE A.T. GUIDE BOOKS (THRU-HIKERS' COMPANION, THE AT GUIDE, etc.) TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE PARK.



jschimer@aol.com
08/16/2011 03:09 PM

105
To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry Fee

Supt. Ditmanson,

I am from the Dayton Ohio area and I am totally against any backcountry camping fee. My friends and I make 2 trips a year to the Smokies to visit friends and backpack and camp in the backcountry. We spend money in Knoxville, Gatlinburg and GSMNP. We purchase t-shirts, hats and guidebooks and other souvenirs in the park. There are plenty of beautiful places surrounding the Smokies and we will gladly take our tourism dollars elsewhere should a backcountry fee be enacted. Once again, I am totally against any proposal to levy a fee on backcountry use.

Jeff Schimer
1460 Howell Rd.
Beavercreek, Oh 45434
jschimer@aol.com



"David Smith"
<DSmith@cityofknoxville.org>

08/16/2011 04:01 PM

106
To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject I am totally AGAINST the proposed fees for backcountry camping.

I am totally AGAINST the proposed fees for backcountry camping



David Knapp
<drknapp83@hotmail.com>

08/16/2011 06:42 PM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc:

bcc:

Subject Proposed Fee For GSM Backcountry Sites

Hello,

I am writing to let you know that I am strongly against any fees for backcountry sites in the Smoky Mountains. Currently I am on a very limited budget and the free backcountry sites allow me to still visit the Park and spend the night (or even a few nights). Charging for the backcountry sites would significantly affect the number of overnight trips I make to the Park each year. As my "home" and "local" Park, this would be truly devastating. Due to the difficult economy and small pay check, I have cut back on car camping in the Park and switched over to backpacking as a way to still visit my favorite place anywhere. I believe this whole idea is ill-conceived and should be abandoned. Thank you for your time and considering my concerns.

David R. Knapp



Elizabeth Tipton
<egkvol@hotmail.com>
08/16/2011 08:00 PM

108

To <GrsmComments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject backpacking fee

I think this nominal fee really shouldn't be a problem. Maybe if someone can prove they can't afford it they can get it waived, but most people spend more on shoes than they would spend in a year of fees.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2011/aug/16/fatal-dog-beating-bound-over-to-grand-jury/>



Brandon Tipton
<btipton1026@gmail.com>
08/16/2011 08:41 PM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry camping

To whom it may concern,

My name is Brandon Tipton and you will find my name on the petition against charging backcountry hikers. I have lived in this area my whole life and started backpacking about three years ago. Some of my best hikes have been in the Smokies. However, I agree with Mr. Baun from the channel 10 news interview. Backpackers use little to no park resources and have the greatest number of volunteers when it comes to trail maintenance. I agree with park officials in the sense that the park needs more funding. I think a more sensible way to get this funding is by maybe charging \$5 per car that drives the cades cove loop. I believe with the amount of traffic that that area of the park endures, it should generate more money than the backpackers. This option also cuts down on the number of personell needed to make sure backpackers are not illegally camping (without paying the fees). It also won't discourage any backpackers from moving away from the smokies to hike elsewhere. Please take my thoughts into consideration and reply back to me with your thoughts.

Thanks,

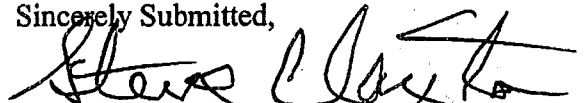
Brandon Tipton

12
August 16, 2011

I was born in Bryson City and have been blessed to be able to call these mountains my home for the past fifty-five years. I have been one of the fortunate ones who have not had to leave this area after high school and college. I have enjoyed raising my children here, sharing the backcountry with my family and friends, and helping to raise awareness of the importance of the national park for the past thirty two years by taking local youth on backpacking excursions. For eighteen of those years I served as the Parks and Recreation Director for Swain County and worked with the National Park Service to offer backcountry educational opportunities to local youth through a summer camping program. I now work with the Swain County School System as the Community Schools Coordinator and take middle school youth in the backcountry through our Summer Adventure Program. I have grown to develop a very deep passion for this park, but at the same time I have a true concern for the local children of this area who want to experience the backcountry in the way that I have been so fortunate to enjoy them.

We live in a very poverty stricken community. I have taken hundreds of kids backpacking over the years who live in single parent homes, or who live in homes with very limited incomes, who otherwise could not have experienced the wonders of the backcountry. I worry about those kids who grow to love the backcountry the way that I do, but simply cannot afford to pay for using this wonderful place we call home. I remember the day when I was a teenager and simply would not have had the money to pay for using the backcountry campsites if there had been a fee charged then. I have no problem paying for the use of backcountry campsites myself now that I am blessed with a great job of working with local youth. But I do know for a fact that a fee system would discourage many local families, especially youth, from having the opportunities that my three brothers and I were so privileged to have growing up in the Great Smoky Mountains. Please take into consideration the local economy in communities like Bryson City and the poverty rates that exists there when considering a backcountry fee system. Consider the impact that this will have on many of the local youth, in financially prohibiting them from having the ultimate experience of camping in the backcountry of one of God's most precious creations on earth, the Great Smoky Mountains!

Sincerely Submitted,



Steve Claxton

PO Box 995
Bryson City, NC 28713
828-736-7501

A

August 16, 2011

Mr. Ditmanson,

I am opposed to the back country camping fee. I have camped in these mountains all of my life so far, without being charged, and hope to continue doing so.

It is not right for the very people that was forced to give up their land, for the people to have a park, to be charged a fee to use it.

Some people cannot come on the days the park established to do decorations, so they have to come whenever they can and camp overnight to be able to visit their families cemeteries, it is not right that they have to pay a fee to do this, after all they were the people that had to give up their land, homes, churches, friends and way of life.

I personally believe as a private citizen and as a Swain County Commissioner for twelve years, it is time for the park officials to do what is honest and right and quit taking from the good people of Swain County and North Carolina.

David Monteith
Swain County Commissioner
1315 Lemons Branch
Bryson City, N.C.

August 16, 2001

10

To Whom It May Concern:

I am opposed to any charge for backcountry camping in the HSMN Park. I speak for the 900+ members of the North Shore Road Association.

There is no research to substantiate any such charge.

We should not have to pay to access and use the Park. That is our right as taxpayers and as ones who have suffered so much so that others can enjoy the Park. I feel this would only be the beginning of many fees to be instigated by the Park Service. Although they deny this, their word is not to be trusted, judging by their past performances.

I OPPOSE CHARGING FOR THE BACKCOUNTRY CAMPING.
WE HAVE ALREADY PAID ENOUGH!

Linda Hogue and Dale Hogue
1122 Lands Creek Road
Bryson City, NC 28713
28-488-9488
mrslghogue@aol.com



Alex Cate
<ralexcate@gmail.com>
08/17/2011 12:32 AM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Proposed Backpacking fee

Id rather see you charge \$1 a car for each one that enters the park, or just cades cove even. That should generate more funds than taxing those camping in the backcountry.

Also with there being so many roads/trails/manways entering the park, enforcing the proposed fees would be difficult and expensive.

Some AT through hikers skip the smokeys cause it is one of the most difficult portions. A fee will encourage more AT tru hikers to skip the smokeys which will hurt the gatlinburg economy among other things.

Thanks
Alex Cate
Seveir county teacher- seymour high
I backcountry camp about 5-8 nights a year.
8653100438



Kirk Rust
<kirkrust@hotmail.com>
08/17/2011 06:24 AM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject Back country camping fee (TAX)

I am writing to express my opposition to the proposed backcountry reservation fee system. This represents nothing more than a tax on back country use. A fraction of the stimulus money which was mis - appropriated to repair horse damaged trails could solve this problem as it would only take two employees answering phones that are NOT volunteers to take the strain off good folks who donate their time. It makes me reconsider any volunteer work I may do in the future when I see park leadership engage in fee grabbing at the expense of the one group that cares most for this natural resource. Therefore, I wish to have my position clearly marked in the NO category with regard to this proposed back country fee.

Thank you,
Kirk Rust

Coralie Bloom/GRSM/NPS
08/17/2011 07:40 AM

112

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Fw: From NPS.gov: Backcountry Fee

Forward from website email.

Coralie Bloom
Great Smoky Mountains National Park

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

----- Forwarded by Coralie Bloom/GRSM/NPS on 08/17/2011 07:39 AM -----



tyler_beamer@yahoo.com
08/16/2011 09:59 PM

To GRSM_Smokies_Information@nps.gov
cc
Subject From NPS.gov: Backcountry Fee

Email submitted from: tyler_beamer@yahoo.com at /grsm/contacts.htm

I request that you do NOT create a fee for backcountry use in the park. I am a North Carolina citizen who lives 15 minutes from the park and am an avid user and guardian of the park. Creating a backcountry fee will do nothing but keep people from using and thus loving and caring for the park. The common man in these rough economical times cannot bear the financial burden that you will cause so they can enjoy nature, which is as part of our DNA. As a taxpayer I feel that I already give my monetary involvement through paying my taxes and additional fees is not fair. If you create fees people will be forced to use other areas such as national forest to enjoy their favorite outdoor activities which will cause additional stress to those areas. The smokies are beautiful let people enjoy them. It is their right as citizens of this planet. I firmly believe that if the park were more efficient in their resources and staff their would not be a problem. When ever their seems to be a problem people automatically believe that throwing money at it will solve all the problems but that is not the case. You will make something so simple and beautiful complicated and evil. People need a break from the complicated and evil world we live in and that is why they turn to mother nature to sooth them and bring them back to their roots.

113
Coralie Bloom/GRSM/NPS
08/17/2011 07:41 AM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Fw: From NPS.gov: Proposed fees for backcountry camping

Forward from website email

Coralie Bloom
Great Smoky Mountains National Park

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

----- Forwarded by Coralie Bloom/GRSM/NPS on 08/17/2011 07:40 AM -----



olgapader@frontier.com
08/16/2011 08:51 PM

To GRSM_Smokies_Information@nps.gov
cc
Subject From NPS.gov: Proposed fees for backcountry camping

Email submitted from: olgapader@frontier.com at /grsm/contacts.htm

Mailing Address

Olga Pader
262 Mine Valley Trail
true
Franklin, North Carolina 28734
United States

I am in full support of fees being assessed for backcountry camping and for reservations. I hike the Smokies nearly once a week and have camped overnight a few times over the years in the backcountry. I have experienced waiting for my calls to be answered when I called the Office and understand well the great job done by the volunteers who man it. I have also camped in the parks out West (Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, Yosemite, Glacier) and paid fees to do so even many years ago). I believe that in these times of budget reductions for federal agencies people should be willing to contribute something for the benefits they receive. A small fee, such as \$5 per person, is probably affordable for most people at a time when they don't hesitate to spend that much on a couple of soft drinks. It's a bargain compared to the cost of going to a ball game, to the movies, or a TV paid program. And we get a lot more for our buck camping under the stars surrounded by the Smokies. I wasn't able to attend tonight's meeting but hope that my opinion will be counted when the fee proposal is reviewed. Thank you for all you do, Olga Pader



<janetdalton@musfiber.com>

08/17/2011 08:39 AM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject No to backcountry fee

I am writing to express my opposition to the proposed backcountry reservation fee (tax) system. Considering the damage that results from horses on trails, I feel charging fees to backpackers is unfair and misplaced. I wish to have my position clearly marked in the NO category with regard to this proposed backcountry fee.

Sincerely,

Janet Dalton
2691 Holston Drive
Morristown, TN 37814
423-736-3298



webseven@comcast.net
08/17/2011 09:04 AM

115
To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject backcountry fee/tax

Please do not impose further charges on the public for the use of the Great Smoky Mountains. Please do not create another tax or fee. Please do not charge for backcountry reservations. Thank you for all you do.



Nancy Gray/GRSM/NPS
08/17/2011 09:37 AM

To: Melissa Cobern/GRSM/NPS@NPS
cc
bcc
Subject: Fw: From NPS.gov: Park Fees - Comment on backcountry camping

Coralie Bloom/GRSM/NPS
08/16/2011 07:35 AM

To: GRSM Superintendent@NPS
cc
Subject: Fw: From NPS.gov: Park Fees

One for you.

Coralie

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

----- Forwarded by Coralie Bloom/GRSM/NPS on 08/16/2011 07:35 AM -----



wcc1945@btes.tv
08/16/2011 05:22 AM

To: GRSM_Smokies_Information@nps.gov
cc
Subject: From NPS.gov: Park Fees

Email submitted from: wcc1945@btes.tv

While I recognize the longstanding tradition of no entry fees at Smoky Park, I believe the time has come to reassess this practice. The present backcountry permit fees being considered should be approved as a "user fee" if there will be additional enforcement of the very crowded "backcountry. The entry fees to be paid at all park entry points should be implemented even if it requires a legal judgement to overcome historical covenants regarding fees. Smoky Park is a national treasure and should be funded at least partially, by those who use it. My wife and I are regular day hikers in the park and I would gladly pay a fee to enter each time we enter or possibly purchase an annual pass.



"McLemore, William (IS)"
<William.McLemore@ngc.com>
>

08/17/2011 10:13 AM

To "grsmcomments@nps.gov" <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc 'Colby's Photography' <colby@colbysphotography.com>
bcc

Subject Proposal to charge fees for backcountry camping.

To who it may concern,

I am emailing to give my opinion of the proposed backcountry fee charges since I am not able to make it to the Thursday Park HQ meeting.

I have been using the backcountry campsite resource for two weeks a year since 1984 at a minimum. I have enjoyed this privilege and resources as much as anyone I know. I have been able to get to know many people and businesses in the area that are related to Hiking, Camping and Fly Fishing the backcountry of the GSMNP and still communicate on a weekly basis.

I find this extremely unfair to target a very small part of the people using the GSMNP resources. I understand that one of the stated reasons for this fee is to help monitor and patrol the backcountry. I feel that if backcountry monitoring is as big a concern as being state we should consider other options that don't include additional fees and government control. I don't understand with all the other public users of the GSMNP that you are considering segregating out the backcountry as needing more government control and fees.

This seems extremely unfair to me.

These are my personal opinions and have nothing to do with who I work for or represent.

William R McLemore
Information Systems
CARS Administrator, MCSE, CNE
ce: 502-229-2407
em: william.mclemore@ngc.com



Adam Beal
<adam.s.beal@gmail.com>
08/17/2011 10:14 AM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Comment on the GSMNP Backcountry Office & Permit
System Restructuring Proposal

Dear Park Superintendent,

As part of the comment period on the GSMNP backcountry office & permit system restructuring proposal I would like to add my voice to the growing dissent on this. I do recognize the need for better enforcement in the GSMNP backcountry at a handful of high traffic campsites and shelters but I don't think that applies to the 80+ sites that get very little if any use. I think the fee structures proposed are unfair and I can prove that. I am very active online blogging about my camping experiences in the Smokies. I support the park not only through tax dollars but also am a member of the GSMA and contribute to Friends of the Smokies. I am a member of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club as well. My wife, son and I backpack often we all love the GSMNP. We live in Maryville just 4 miles from the park so we get out into nature as much as we can often time we spend 2 or 3 nights a month backpacking. The Smokies are literally our backyard. I have often told my son one of the things that make the Smokies unique and special is the very fact that we don't have to pay money to hike and backpack here. He understands this. We practice leave no trace and often carry out garbage helping to police the backcountry where we can. We have often helped out the NPS doing things like notifying Bill Stiver and others when we have found bear hang issues. I would have a hard time explaining different to him now why we have to pay to stay at a site where we are the only ones I ever see there even on a weekend. Here is the proof this proposal is unfair which I offer to you for serious consideration. I have figured out what it would cost us under each plan and here it is figuring my son and I do about 2 one night trips a month backpacking:

- Under the \$10 per reservation + \$5 per person fee structure it would have cost us **\$480** last year
- Under the \$10 per reservation + \$2.25 per person per night fee structure it would have cost us **\$348** last year
- Under the \$4 per person per night fee structure it would have cost us **\$192** a year to backpack last year alone

This is pretty clear evidence this fee structure isn't reasonable at all for frequent users like my family and I. I just included the stats only for my son and I but often my wife Amanda comes along too. I personally didn't even want to see the numbers if I included her also.

I really think you should either drop this proposal altogether or come up with a different plan that takes into account frequent users of the park or maybe only charge for heavy use areas where the majority of the problems are happening such as Icewater Springs shelter, Mt Collins shelter, cs 37, among others. Backpackers and hikers are probably the very best advocates of the GSMNP. We fight for the park and assist the park service time after time. Please listen to us as we are telling you there is a real problem with this proposal.

Respectfully,

Adam Beal

Maryville, TN



Rebecca Cazana
<rebecca@ciprop.com>
08/17/2011 10:32 AM

To "grsmcomments@nps.gov" <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject Fees

I have no idea what a camping fee should be as I am not a camper but I do think it is reasonable to ask campers to pay a fee and have online reservations and rangers to check them since it seems to be a problem with persons getting there and camping with no reservations and taking over campsites of those that followed the rules.

Of course, I also think we should be charging an entrance fee to the park to help maintain it. I know how it was set up but I also know when Ringling gave money for a museum in Florida he wanted all to be able to attend so it was set up that Mondays would be free and open to the public. Surely we could do something like that.

Rebecca Cazana

865-588-6895 H

865-389-2113 C



Frank Whitehead
<smoky0498@yahoo.com>

08/17/2011 12:30 PM

Please respond to
Frank Whitehead
<smoky0498@yahoo.com>

To "grsmcomments@nps.gov" <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject proposed fee

History:

☞ This message has been replied to.

To whom it may concern.

I assume no emails will be answered and possibly not even read. However, because the GSMNP is a park that I truly love I will pose my questions anyway.

1. How do we know that your backpacker only fee (which seems a bit unfair) will only go towards backcountry management and not diverted later for something you deem more important.

2. Why won't you consider an annual pass to those who frequent the park??? Give backpackers the option of this pass and I think the park has the potential to raise more funds. Many would like just an up front fee. I don't believe its the backpackers that frequent the park that cause the majority the backcountry issues. When my family is set up at a site its those that backpacker a few times a year that seem to not know or just don't care about the LNT principals.

Its not the backpacker that caused the Laurel Bear incident and the park man hours to address it. Its not the backpackers that cause the bear jams around cades cove which in turn forces rangers to come out and address the issue. The list goes on and on. Why not extend an olive branch to those that frequent the park often and reward us by offering an annual fee? i often call the backcountry office once I leave a site to report on its condition. Don't you need us and much as we need you? As you can tell I'm willing to contribute a small fee.....but make it fair!!! Sadly I believe this email has by now fallen on deaf ears and as quick as it is read it will be moved to the trash bin. At any rate I have voiced my concern.

Thanks.

Frank



Wayne Davis
<waynedavisforpresident@yahoo.com>

08/17/2011 12:37 PM

120
To grsmcomments@nps.gov, John Adams NRDC President
<members@nrdcacion.org>, shaun akins
<everyaddresshasbeentaken@yahoo.com>, valerie
cc John Adams NRDC President <members@nrdcacion.org>,
shaun akins <everyaddresshasbeentaken@yahoo.com>,
valerie armstrong <toroloco80@hotmail.com>, Brian Barone
bcc

Subject Please consider my hope.

Please do not charge/tax/ take our money yet again in another myriad of form, for something as simple as sleeping on the ground, eating dried noodles, trying to rejuvenate and connect our spirit in the original chapel. Remember God before he became money? Why do you go after the people who use the park in its simplest and purist form, actually get out of the car, leave the air conditioned winnebago and its ten thousand individual pieces of over appointed throw away junk, do the least amount of impact(leave no trace) at least we have a motto and most abide, and probably donate the most money, i give happily and often as i can because i love our wild island in the east and because i am not forced to have my wallet opened up and robbed by some strangers greedy hand. I understand charging a fee at full service campgrounds with all the amenities of comfort(flushing toilets, water, showers, dish washing stations, snack bars, waste dump stations, dumpsters and garbage service, electricity, paved slabs, stores, firewood, entertainment programs/movies, tunnel expansion, grills/campfire rings, signage everywhere, generators, fat garbage feed animals, I get it. These are big and true impacts and require costs for luxuries and services, and I know that everyone is having a nice time or at least i hope so, good, maybe when it comes time to vote to take care of our last remaining wild places they will remember the beauty and serenity and vote to save for all generations to have connection to something greater than ourselves, " a constant prayer across the wilderness". Out west in our parks and wild lands there were so many individual fees itemized for everything that greed could think of that many places we could not afford to go even though you realize that your normal tax dollars have already paid for these places many times over ,I mean the ones that have not been wasted or abused of course. Once fees are ruled they never go back always go up in price expand to other areas as they can think of it And always discriminate against those who can't afford yet one more extra cost on themselves or their family to go sweat and struggle, and rise up, in the deep wood to find some small remaining place of beauty and peace still left alone by greed and money. God without a price tag. (They)will eventually charge us for everything (they) think or discover that we like to do unless you/we protect ourselves by resisting, networking, Voting away the Chupacabra. My discontent is only directed at those "whom the hat fits" not everyone, as i have met some of the Finest people both in the park service and outside working hard to protect our last sacred wild places protecting the soul of the people even if they don't realize it. God bless, still your friend, for you protect my wilderness, wayne davis



Happy Sunshine
<happysunshine@rocketmail.
com>

08/17/2011 03:20 PM

Please respond to
Happy Sunshine
<happysunshine@rocketmail.c
om>

To "grsmcomments@nps.gov" <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject NO to backcountry fee

I am writing to express my oppositioa to the proposed backcountry reservation fee system. This represents nothing more than a tax on backcountry use. A fraction of the stimulus money which was mis appropriated to repair horse damaged trails could solve this problem as it would only take two employees answering phones that are NOT volunteers to take the strain off good folks who donate their time. It makes me reconsider any volunteer work I may do in the future when I see park leadership engage in fee grabbing at the expense of the one group that cares most for this natural resource. Therefore, I wish to have my position clearly marked in the NO category with regard to this proposed backcountry fee.

Respectfully,
Denise Mitchell



"Jim Casada"
<jimcasada@comporium.net>

08/17/2011 03:49 PM

To <GrsmComments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry camping fees

102

This whole proposal is an abomination, a slap in the face to some of the Park's best friends, a betrayal to the folks who gave up their hearth and home for creation of the Park, and a solution in search of a problem. In short, it is the latest in a seemingly never-ending series of Park boondoggles. My column from a recent issue of the *Smoky Mountain Times* which deals with this issue and offers my thoughts in greater detail is attached. Are you folks sitting around just thinking of ways to irritate people? You have no factual basis for this (the press release tacitly admits as much) proposal, so why do it? Shame!



Dr. Jim Casada SMT 8-11-11.docx



jacqui whittemore
<jacquichris@gmail.com>
08/17/2011 05:30 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc

Subject Backcountry Office & Permit System Restructuring Proposal

I am writing to express strong opposition to the Backcountry Office & Permit System Restructuring Proposal on behalf of myself and my fiancé. As avid hikers and regular backpackers in the GSMNP, we are quite familiar with the various types of park users and the most common violations of park rules. We believe this proposal exaggerates minor challenges with the current system into 'problems', will not result in substantive improvements in GSMNP management or user experience, and is in violation of the state of Tennessee stipulations at time of park founding.

Per the memo released by the Backcountry office, this proposal is designed to 1) improve backcountry travel planning assistance, 2) improve ranger presence to decrease park violations like dogs on trails and overcamping, and 3) improve safety by increasing the ease of automated communication with park users. I will address each of these putative needs in series, along with our concerns.

1) Improve backcountry travel planning assistance

From our experience, most backpackers that utilize the park do so without any interest in 'planning assistance' from the Backcountry office. They have taken the time to learn about the park using widely available resources and personal experience. It is neither reasonable nor fair to subsidize travel planning for a subset of GSMNP users through admission fees on this larger body of park users.

2) Increase ranger presence to decrease park violations like dogs on trails and overcamping
The majority of violations of park rules are committed by a small subset of tourists. These uninformed and disrespectful individuals commonly bring dogs into the park, take them on trails, often *off leash*, and leave trails strewn with litter. These individuals, however, rarely come into the backcountry. In years of backpacking within the park, the only major violations I have encountered are cases of campsite decimation at popular horse campsites (discussed further below). With regard to typical and frequent violations, individuals generally are confined to a select group of overhiked trails (Alum Gap for example). Very few rangers are needed to provide presence at these widely used and shorter trails. The astronomical fees generated by this proposal are hardly appropriate to manage these issues.

With regard to decreasing 'overcamping' and the impact on local vegetation and wildlife, we anticipate that this proposal would actually *worsen* the (currently minimal) problem. Shelters already require reservation, as do the most frequently used sites. If additional areas of overcamping are identified, they should be addressed on a case-by-case basis and potentially additional sites should be added in hard to reach areas. We anticipate enactment of this proposal will result in decreased compliance with permit requirements in general, increase non-permitted camping at established campsites, and increase 'pirate camping' to avoid potential ticketing due to any realized increase in ranger presence in the backcountry. We feel that this is particularly true because of ill will generated by the radical change in availability of campsites to users and the unfair leverage of costs related to a small subset of users onto individuals that often are younger

and thus much lower in income, yet they are simultaneously more informed about and committed to the park. Additionally, anyone who uses the trails is aware that horses do most of the damage. Backpackers have very little impact, yet this proposal would leverage the costs of policing horse users, and repairing their damage, on hikers. If an access fee is to be charged, a fee per horse should be added and the cost for hikers decreased proportionally to their impact.

3) Improve safety by increasing the ease of automated communication with park users
In spite of our the remarkable way technology has permeated almost every corner of society, backpackers often travel great distances to come to GSMNP. Computers and phones are often left behind to prevent theft or rendered useless by 'No Service' zones. This means that users are quite unlikely to *receive* automated communications in a timely fashion and will still be dependent on trail signs for updates. Additionally, because *all* campsites would be reservation only, hikers so unfortunate as to have a campsite be closed would then be forced to either cancel plans, camp in violation at established sites, or pirate camp.
Additionally, GSMNP Backcountry officials currently can update *all* park users on trail situations by listing trail and campsite closures on their website and at trailheads. The website is quite frequently out of date, as are trail notices. Adding additional layers of administration and interfaces to update information can only be anticipated to worsen this process. Additionally, because an online reservation is tied to an individual email address – regardless of whether there is 1 or 8 people in the party – this would shift the ability to update users on campsite conditions from all individuals to 1 person per party.

Finally, from the NPS website:

When the state of Tennessee transferred ownership of Newfound Gap Road to the federal government in 1936, it stipulated that "no toll or license fee shall ever be imposed..." to travel the road... Action by the Tennessee legislature would be required to lift this deed restriction if Great Smoky Mountains National Park ever wished to charge an entrance fee.

Because many areas of the park can't be reached without overnight stays, the proposed 'access fee' is in effect an entrance fee or toll, which violates the conditions under which GSMNP was founded. Changing this mandate would require action by the Tennessee legislature, which seems unlikely (and ill-fated) because this proposal particularly impacts Tennessee residents who regularly use the park and adjust their plans on short notice based on weather factors. Legal challenge can be anticipated on these grounds should the Backcountry office push forward with this proposal.

My fiance and I urge you to reconsider this unfortunate proposal. We strongly oppose it and will be reaching out to our state and local representatives. We also will be sharing our opposition with non-profit groups whose projects, like the Trails Forever program, we fund to sustain and enhance GSMNP.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Whittemore, DVM PhD DACVIM
3600 Sevier Heights
Knoxville TN 37920
jacquichris@gmail.com



wendi stinnett
<wendistinnett@yahoo.com>

08/17/2011 07:23 PM

124
To wendistinnett@yahoo.com, grsmcomments@nps.gov, John
Adams NRDC President <members@nrdcaction.org>

cc

bcc

Subject Backcounty tax

I am writing in regards to the proposed wilderness tax. I realize that money is stretched thin across the board now and has been for a while, but that is also why we need that place that we can go that is free--that place that we can count on, the woods, where our solitude and fun are free. Backpackers strive to go and leave the mountains exactly as we met them, we strive to leave the least impact, and we strive to require only the natural resources. Please don't charge us for what was intended to be free. Please don't make us pay for how we get close to nature in its purest form.

Thank you for listening,
Wendi Lesmerises



Jenny
<jawzwhite13@aim.com>
08/17/2011 08:07 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject backcountry tax

Dear Sir,

I feel that this tax is an unjust decision made at the expense of backcountry hikers. The people who are the heart and soul of the park. The people who love and care for the park. The people who would never take advantage and damage the park. This is a way you feel of getting around the no entrance fee loop hole and charging a population that you feel will always be there steadfastly. And if passed, you are correct sir. But the ones who need the extra services are not the backcountry hikers. They can take care of themselves. Please reconsider your proposal and drop this idea.

Thank you,

Jenny Howe
jawzwhite13@netscape.net



"Mike Wilson"
<mmwilson1@earthlink.net>
08/17/2011 08:11 PM

1218
To: <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject: Backcountry Fee Proposal

Dear NPS,

I would like state my opposition to the proposed fees to be charged for backcountry use. While we don't backpack as much as we did when we were younger we still enjoy one or two trips a year. It would not be much of a burden on us for that reason but it would be for many people that are often able to use this resource that we tax payers own. If you are going to charge backpackers then you should charge the people on horseback that destroy the trails and the people that drive round and round Cades Cove and spew diesel and gas fumes. If one group has to pay for use then all should have to pay.

I don't oppose a reservation system for use of backcountry sites but feel charging a fee is unfair and unwarranted.

Thank you,

Michael Wilson
Emerson, GA



Bckcntry4me@aol.com

08/17/2011 08:40 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject (no subject)

I am FOR the proposed backcountry fee system.



Martin Hunley
<mchunley@yahoo.com>
08/18/2011 06:02 AM

128

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc "Martin Hunley \work\" <mchunley@yahoo.com>
bcc
Subject Backcountry Fees ---- I say NO!!!!!!

I have backpacked more than 600 miles of our lovely GSMNP and never have seen the need for this action. I made myself informed and through friends made our trips enjoyable. However, I have seen a lot of damage to the trails during wet seasons and to a few campsites due to the horse traffic.... I say this is the area you may want to look into. I really would hate to see our free park come to this. I am in New York right now, and from what I see up here with these type of charges to their park system, toll roads, toll bridges, and etc..... It never stops.

I am writing to express my opposition to the proposed backcountry reservation fee system. This represents nothing more than a ~~tax on~~ backcountry use. A fraction of the stimulus money which was misappropriated to repair horse damaged trails could solve this problem as it would only take two employees answering phones that are NOT volunteers to take the strain off good folks who donate their time. It makes me reconsider any volunteer work I may do in the future when I see park leadership engage in fee grabbing at the expense of the one group that cares most for this natural resource. Therefore, I wish to have my position clearly marked in the NO category with regard to this proposed backcountry fee.

Sincerely,

Martin Hunley
cell # 845.505.1671

[http://www.tripofalifetimephotos.co](http://www.tripofalifetimephotos.com)
m



"michelle m spurgeon"
<jmsspurgeon@bellsouth.net
>

08/18/2011 07:39 AM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject

Please do not charge for back country camping ! The park gets enough !



Mandy.Wilson@shawinc.com
08/18/2011 11:08 AM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry Fee Proposal

Dear NPS,

I would like state my opposition to the proposed fees to be charged for backcountry use. While we don't backpack as much as we did when we were younger we still enjoy one or two trips a year. It would not be much of a burden on us for that reason but, it would be for many people that are often only able to use this resource that we tax payers own.

If you are going to charge backpackers then you should charge the people on horseback that destroy the trails and the people that drive round and round Cades Cove and spew diesel and gas fumes. If one group has to pay for use then all should have to pay. And I must remind you that this breaks a covenant from the very foundation of the park.

I don't oppose a reservation system for use of backcountry sites but, feel charging a fee is unfair and unwarranted.

Thank you,
Mandy Wilson
Emerson, GA

Privileged and/or confidential information may be contained in this message. If you are not the addressee indicated in this message (or are not responsible for delivery of this message to that person) , you may not copy or deliver this message to anyone. In such case, you should destroy this message and notify the sender by reply e-mail.

If you or your employer do not consent to Internet e-mail for messages of this kind, please advise the sender.

Shaw Industries does not provide or endorse any opinions, conclusions or other information in this message that do not relate to the official business of the company or its subsidiaries.



ReadCtr@aol.com
08/18/2011 11:15 AM

131
To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Please No More Fees

Fees, taxes, and subsidies and then death. Please, no more.

Richard Allison



"Martinelli, Michael J."
<MARTIM1@airproducts.com>
>

08/18/2011 11:39 AM

To <GrsmComments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject backcountry fees

132

As a backcountry hiker and outdoor enthusiast I believe the proposed fee wouldn't do much good. it would put less people on the trail as well as cut the adventures of younger generations. I have heard that the fees will go to the backcountry awareness programs, if they are available, and help on the trail systems. The volunteers that now try to preserve what is left in some areas have a hard enough time finding funds and time to, well volunteer.

If there was an online signature form against the backcountry fees I would sign it. Try to find funds from your politicians pockets.

Michael Martinelli

MARTIM1@AIRPRODUCTS.COM



Liz Domingue
<Liz@justgetoutdoors.com>
Sent by:
justgetoutdoors@gmail.com

To grsmcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

08/18/2011 12:07 PM

Subject Backcountry Office & Permit System Restructuring Proposal

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to respond to the current proposal. I really only have one major concern regarding the proposal. This has to do with having Recreation.gov handle reservations, fee collection, etc. I have personally made reservations through this organization many times at various locations in the United States and I usually am not satisfied with their service. There are a few major problems, as I see it.

1/ Typically when 'you' call up and talk to someone about a reservation, they are not informed about the area and are not very helpful in choosing sites, dates, etc. They don't seem to know about the very park for which they are making reservations. That is not helpful.

2/ In my experience, there are no refunds provided through Recreation.gov, regardless of the amount of time remaining before your reserved date and regardless of the situation. I personally don't think this is appropriate or fair - things happen.

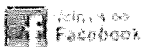
3/ It is a very depersonalized experience.

Though I have not had issues with making reservations in GRSM, I can understand why a reservation system might be helpful. However, I urge you and ask you to please find an alternative answer, rather than going the depersonalized way of using Recreation.gov. I think the customer service at this park is very good and I am almost certain it would not be improved by using Recreation.gov.

Thanks again for the chance to submit my opinion, Liz Domingue

--

Liz Domingue
JUST GET OUTDOORS!
2198 Oakwood Road
Walland, TN 37886-3105
www.justgetoutdoors.com
Phone #: 865-977-NIKE (4433)





"Wayne Howell (Net-Alert)"
<awhowell@gmail.com>

08/18/2011 02:22 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Park Fees

I am an avid backpacker who lives in Middle Tennessee. I go to GSMNP 5-10 times per year. With prices for gear, fuel, vehicles etc. it would be simply more money than I can afford to return on backcountry trips to GSMNP. I will instead travel to Cherokee/Nantahala area for trips in the future if these fees are imposed.



"Fred Turner"
<fredturner@saintclairmapping.com>

08/18/2011 03:13 PM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Charging Fees for Backcountry Campsites

Dear Park Officials:

As someone who is trying to foster more fishing of the backcountry streams, I am less than real supportive of charging fees for backcountry campsites, other than perhaps a token amount to discourage those that might otherwise abuse the sites.

Best regards,

Fred R Turner
Saint Clair Mapping
P.O. Box 398
Russellville, TN 37860
fredturner@saintclairmapping.com
www.smokystreams.com



Dana Koogler
<waterfalldreams@yahoo.com>
>

08/18/2011 03:45 PM

Please respond to
Dana Koogler
<waterfalldreams@yahoo.com>
>

To "grsmcomments@nps.gov" <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Opposition to Proposed Backcountry Tax/Fee

To Superintendent Ditmanson:

Sir, I am writing to express my opposition to the proposed back country fee.

NO to backcountry fee

I am writing to express my opposition to the proposed backcountry reservation fee system. This represents nothing more than a tax on backcountry use. A fraction of the stimulus money which was misappropriated to repair horse damaged trails could solve this problem as it would

only take two employees answering phones that are NOT volunteers to take the strain off good folks who donate their time. It makes me reconsider any volunteer work I may do in the future when I see park leadership engage in fee grabbing at the expense of the one group that cares most for this natural resource. Therefore, I wish to have my position clearly marked in the NO category with regard to this proposed backcountry fee.

I also feel it is worth mentioning that several of the conditions to be met to turn the Smokies into a National Park were 1. no fee ever and 2. to continue to allow horses in the park. I will agree that the time has come to charge ANY type of fee for using the Smokies if and when the horses are no longer permitted within the park boundaries..

I am an avid hiker and backpacker. I love the GSMNP and what it represents. Without it the area would have become bereft and be gone forever. I have seen much damage done to the trails and campsites by horse riders. I have found materials cached that were only able to be toted in because of the ability of persons to bring these items in on horseback.

I have been up on Gregory Bald with my spouse during peak azalea bloom. His first trip up there ever. Only to be confronted by a horseman up on the bald itself with his horse. I have photographic evidence of this. The horses are to stop at a point down the trail before the approach to the bald on Gregory Bald Trail. He was aware of this and told me so and was totally unconcerned. I put this person in the same category as those who would build a fire upon a grassy bald. It is a damaging process that needs to be stopped.

I write to express my disgust with both practices. NO FEES. NO HORSES!

Sincerely,

Dana Bradley-Koogler



tinamarie wood
<trailspirit@hotmail.com>

08/18/2011 07:58 PM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject: revenue

Can NPS charge for the day use of picnic area's? Per table. Frontcountry camping has fee's. B 'country & shelters will soon have a fee.
Why not picnic area's? Afterall, visitors local and non local are using the tables, water, t-paper ect... The pavillions already have fee's and reservations.

Seems like we need to spread the fee's around to all visitors, not just to select front & b'country campers as a means of revenue.

Just a thought.

tm



"Darrell and Melissa"
<dwshef@live.com>

08/18/2011 10:36 PM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Comments- Backcountry Office and Permit System
Restructuring Proposal

Superintendent Ditmanson:

I offer the following comments regarding the Backcountry Office and Permit System Restructuring Proposal released on July 27, 2011:

Your proposal to charge for overnight backcountry camping is against equity and good conscience for a number of reasons.

1. First, it singles out a small and unique group to assess user fees while excluding the vast majority of park users. Horse riders, day hikers, automobile passengers, bicyclists, and others who are heavy users of the park will pay no user fees under your new plan while at the same time causing much if not most of the impact on the park. Millions of users drive through Cades Cove per year at no cost not to mention the millions that have been spent in recent years on the road resurfacing projects across the park. Horses litter the trails with feces and produce trenches in the most heavily used areas. Day hikers and the thousands of individuals who tube in Deep Creek are served by rangers and are frequently involved in rescues, injuries, and littering. None of these groups will be asked to pay any fees.
2. Second, the fee structure proposal could result in families being charged fees in excess of what is currently charged to use a frontcountry site. For example, my wife and I have 4 (under age 13) children that frequently camp in the both established campgrounds and the backcountry. A campsite in the frontcountry could cost anywhere from \$14-\$23 per night. Under your proposal, we would have to pay between \$23 - \$30 per night in the backcountry. A simple flat fee per permit would be more equitable but no permit fee is still the optimum answer.
3. The fees and penalties associated with canceling or changing plans are exorbitant. A cursory review of the recreation.gov website shows that these fees could exceed the cost of the original permit.
4. Finally, these fees will not provide any additional benefit to the users rather it will provide a benefit only to the Park Service. These fees would not provide improvements to facilities rather they would only fund the oversight and enforcement of the new permit fee structure.

As to Cost Savings, this new proposal serves no purpose to reduce existing costs incurred by the Park Service. Rather, this proposal would increase the overall administrative burden and costs that the Park Service will incur in future funding years by establishing personnel costs, equipment costs, vehicle expenses, and more that will not be recovered by these fees.

Enforcement of this proposed system would be difficult if not impossible. The number of access points in the park along with the extended backcountry trail system are unique features of the GSMNP that would create an unenforceable system. With over 100 campsites, your proposal would require dozens of rangers to be on call in the park on each day. The Park should expect that many individuals will begin to

"stealth" camp by camping in undesignated areas to avoid fines and penalties creating more environmental damage and increased costs to enforce the fee structure.

Normally, compliant, law abiding citizens will be put into situations where they will lack valid permits due to changes in plans and other unavoidable circumstances. Imagine a backpacker driving from south Florida on an all night trip to reach the park only to find a road closure near where they were to enter the park. To make a last minute change, one assumes that they would have to drive around the entire park to Sugarlands, pay a fee to change or cancel their original reservation, and then pay a new fee for a new permit. The fuel cost alone makes this problematic and environmentally unfriendly.

The Park will see an immediate reduction in the number of backcountry nights under this system. The reduced flexibility, difficulty in making trip plans, and increased burden on users will have backpackers leaving the park for many of the surrounding areas that have virtually no permit system and charge no user fees. This reduction in use will undermine the fee structure. It will also reduce the number of citizens who protect the park, donate to the Friends of the Park and GSMA, and most importantly, it will reduce the number of people that benefit from the special wild beauty of GSMNP.

At a time when our First Lady is encouraging young people to get out and get moving and at a time when our nation's people are hurting financially, it would seem that the National Park Service Proposal to restructure the Backcountry Office and Permit System is misguided in that it works against both of these concerns. In summary, your proposed plan increased overall costs to the government, increases the negative environmental impact, reduces the number of park users, is inequitable and burdensome, and is unenforceable.

I urge you, Superintendent, along with the Park Service, to abandon this plan in favor of the status quo. For 76 years, this incredible gem of a National Park has been able to offer open and relatively unrestricted access to some of the most scenic and majestic beauty in the world...without this fee structure.

Darrell Sheffield
6810 Ridge Field Green Court
Alpharetta, GA 30005
(678) 965-8891



Dale Ditmanson/GRSM/NPS
08/19/2011 08:37 AM

To Melissa Cobern/GRSM/NPS@NPS, Clayton
Jordan/GRSM/NPS@NPS, Kevin
Fitzgerald/GRSM/NPS@NPS

cc

bcc

Subject Fw: backcountry proposal

FYI - I sent Sutton a thanks note.

Dale A. Ditmanson
Superintendent
Great Smoky Mountains National Park
107 Park Headquarters Road
Gatlinburg, TN 37738
865-436-1201
865-436-1204 (fax)

----- Forwarded by Dale Ditmanson/GRSM/NPS on 08/19/2011 08:36 AM -----



Sutton Bacon
<sutton.bacon@noc.com>
08/17/2011 09:54 PM

To <dale_ditmanson@nps.gov>
cc

Subject backcountry proposal

Superintendent,

I ran into John Mitchell last week and he suggested reaching out to you about the backcountry proposal. We are strongly supportive of enhancements to the visitor experience in the park and the funding of your personnel.

Please let us know if there is anything NOC can do to assist you with the promotion of the new system or with camper registration services at our stores in Gatlinburg and Bryson City. We are willing to do everything we can to support the park.

I hope this message finds you well.

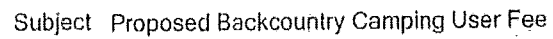
Regards,
Sutton

Sutton Bacon | President & CEO
Nantahala Outdoor Center

13077 Highway 19 West
Bryson City, North Carolina 28713
828-488-7251 (direct) | www.noc.com

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Case 3:13-cv-00116-TWP-HBG Document 39-4 Filed 05/07/14 Page 176 of 170 Pages 176 of 170
847



Chuck Janack
<cwjanack1@gmail.com>
08/19/2011 10:49 AM

140
To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject regarding backcountry permit fees...

Dear Dale Ditmanson:

Regarding the Backpacking Office & Permit System Restructuring Proposal: My wife and I are working to complete all trails in the park and use the backcountry sites as often as our schedules allow (not often enough), usually 2-4 times a year. Speaking for myself, I am not opposed to fees as I do believe in contributing to site maintenance. Both she and I volunteered for years on trails day until I hurt my back about four years ago. We have GSM plates on our car and are life members of the Great Smoky Mountain Association as well. If I were to voice a choice it would be for the \$10 per reservation + \$5 per person. I do believe it is important to increase ranger presence in the backcountry as I have certainly experienced deliberate abuse. (Having no reservation at all vs having to move from your reserved site to another due to bear activity, high water, or other valid reason.) Plus, a better system of notifying backcountry users of closures and problems would be very helpful.

I do appreciate the opportunity to share my comments.

Sincerely,

Chuck Janack
Knoxville, Tennessee



Nancy Gray/GRSM/NPS
08/19/2011 11:14 AM

To: Melissa Cobern/GRSM/NPS@NPS
cc
bcc

Subject: Fw: Great Smoky Mountain National Park Backcountry Office Proposal

You might have already received this . . .



"Sarah Weeks"
<fotssw@bellsouth.net>
08/19/2011 09:33 AM

To: "Jacqui Whittemore" <jacquichris@gmail.com>
cc: <Dale_Ditmanson@nps.gov>, <Kevin_Fitzgerald@nps.gov>, <Nancy_Gray@nps.gov>, "Jim Hart" <fotsjhart@bellsouth.net>

Subject: RE: Great Smoky Mountain National Park Backcountry Office Proposal

Hi, Jacqui,

It's good to hear from you. I hope that things are going well for you and your fiancé. I think of you often.

Thank you for sharing your opinion about the proposed backcountry permit system being explored by GSMNP. By copy of this reply, I am sharing your memo with Dale Ditmanson, Superintendent, and Kevin FitzGerald, Deputy Superintendent, of the park. While Friends of the Smokies appreciates hearing your perspective, our memorandum of agreement with the National Park Service prohibits us from publicly advocating for or against a policy or procedure. Therefore, you will not see us coming out for or against the current backcountry proposal. The best I can do is forward your message on to the park. Your timing is great, because the park is currently seeking input from the public, especially the users of the backcountry sites.

Please let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Best,
Sarah

Sarah J. Weeks
Director of Development
Friends of the Smokies
PO Box 1660
Kodak, TN 37764-7660
Phone: 865-932-4794
Fax: 865-933-7607
Email: fotssw@bellsouth.net

From: jacqui whittemore [mailto:jacquichris@gmail.com]
Sent: Wednesday, August 17, 2011 5:44 PM
To: Sarah Weeks
Subject: Great Smoky Mountain National Park Backcountry Office Proposal

Dear Ms. Weeks,

It has been a while since we chatted. I hope very much you are well. I am writing to express

strong opposition to the Backcountry Office & Permit System Restructuring Proposal on behalf of myself and my fiancé. As avid hikers and regular backpackers in the GSMNP, we are quite familiar with the various types of park users and the most common violations of park rules. We believe this proposal exaggerates minor challenges with the current system into 'problems', will not result in substantive improvements in GSMNP management or user experience, and is in violation of the state of Tennessee stipulations at time of park founding.

- Per the memo released by the Backcountry office, this proposal is designed to 1) improve backcountry travel planning assistance, 2) improve ranger presence to decrease park violations like dogs on trails and overcamping, and 3) improve safety by increasing the ease of automated communication with park users. I will address each of these putative needs in series, along with our concerns.

1) Improve backcountry travel planning assistance

From our experience, most backpackers that utilize the park do so without any interest in 'planning assistance' from the Backcountry office. They have taken the time to learn about the park using widely available resources and personal experience. It is neither reasonable nor fair to subsidize travel planning for a subset of GSMNP users through admission fees on this larger body of park users.

2) Increase ranger presence to decrease park violations like dogs on trails and overcamping

The majority of violations of park rules are committed by a small subset of tourists. These uninformed and disrespectful individuals commonly bring dogs into the park, take them on trails, often *off leash*, and leave trails strewn with litter. These individuals, however, rarely come into the backcountry. In years of backpacking within the park, the only major violations I have encountered are cases of campsite decimation at popular horse campsites (discussed further below). With regard to typical and frequent violations, individuals generally are confined to a select group of overhiked trails (Alum Gap for example). Very few rangers are needed to provide presence at these widely used and shorter trails. The astronomical fees generated by this proposal are hardly appropriate to manage these issues.

With regard to decreasing 'overcamping' and the impact on local vegetation and wildlife, we anticipate that this proposal would actually *worsen* the (currently minimal) problem. Shelters already require reservation, as do the most frequently used sites. If additional areas of overcamping are identified, they should be addressed on a case-by-case basis and potentially additional sites should be added in hard to reach areas. We anticipate enactment of this proposal will result in decreased compliance with permit requirements in general, increase non-permitted camping at established campsites, and increase 'pirate camping' to avoid potential ticketing due to any realized increase in ranger presence in the backcountry. We feel that this is particularly true because of ill will generated by the radical change in availability of campsites to users and the unfair leverage of costs related to a small subset of users onto individuals that often are younger and thus much lower in income, yet they are simultaneously more informed about and committed to the park. Additionally, anyone who uses the trails is aware that horses do most of the damage. Backpackers have very little impact, yet this proposal would leverage the costs of policing horse users, and repairing their damage, on hikers. If an access fee is to be charged, a fee per horse should be added and the cost for hikers decreased proportionally to their impact.

3) Improve safety by increasing the ease of automated communication with park users

In spite of our the remarkable way technology has permeated almost every corner of society, backpackers often travel great distances to come to GSMNP. Computers and phones are often left behind to prevent theft or rendered useless by 'No Service' zones. This means that users are quite unlikely to *receive* automated communications in a timely fashion and will still be dependent on trail signs for updates. Additionally, because *all* campsites would be reservation only, hikers so unfortunate as to have a campsite be closed would then be forced to either cancel plans, camp in violation at established sites, or pirate camp.

Additionally, GSMNP Backcountry officials currently can update *all* park users on trail situations by listing trail and campsite closures on their website and at trailheads. The website is quite frequently out of date, as are trail notices. Adding additional layers of administration and interfaces to update information can only be anticipated to worsen this process. Additionally, because an online reservation is tied to an individual email address – regardless of whether there is 1 or 8 people in the party – this would shift the ability to update users on campsite conditions from all individuals to 1 person per party.

Finally, from the NPS website:

When the state of Tennessee transferred ownership of Newfound Gap Road to the federal government in 1936, it stipulated that "no toll or license fee shall ever be imposed..." to travel the road... Action by the Tennessee legislature would be required to lift this deed restriction if Great Smoky Mountains National Park ever wished to charge an entrance fee.

Because many areas of the park can't be reached without overnight stays, the proposed 'access fee' is in effect an entrance fee or toll, which violates the conditions under which GSMNP was founded. Changing this mandate would require action by the Tennessee legislature, which seems unlikely (and ill-fated) because this proposal particularly impacts Tennessee residents who regularly use the park and adjust their plans on short notice based on weather factors. Legal challenge can be anticipated on these grounds should the Backcountry office push forward with this proposal.

My fiance and I urge Friends of the Smokies to stand with us in opposition to this unfortunate proposal. Thanks so much for your time,

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Whittemore, DVM PhD DACVIM
3600 Sevier Heights
Knoxville TN 37920
jacquichris@gmail.com



"Nadine & Bill Wilder"
<w_wilder08@comcast.net>
08/19/2011 11:23 AM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject Proposed fees for backcountry users

I am firmly against the proposed fees. Back country hikers work hard to get to places off the beaten path and should not be penalized or taxed for their efforts while those who drive freely in and about all the park roads without any payment whatsoever do so without a special tax levied upon them. Furthermore, based on many years of backcountry trips and the absence of trash, wanton destruction of trees, etc., I expect that most backcountry hikers respect park rules and don't trash up the backcountry or violate park rules. If additional staff are needed for patrolling, or manning phones, etc., I recommend giving up a tiny tiny fraction of the federal defense budget or some other coveted massive budget allocation to cover the necessary costs. Thank you for your consideration of my opinions.



Jeffrey Sweeney
<sweenjr@gmail.com>
08/19/2011 11:45 AM

142
To GrsmComments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Proposed Fees for Back country permits

Dear Great Smokey Mountains Administration Personal,

The proposed fee for back country permits is understandable, but too steep. Many local and regional hikers can not afford the over night fees which are being proposed. If it is necessary to charge there should be an annual pass for no more than \$30.00. The annual pass option allows local hikers to enjoy their hiking experience and not break the bank. As a low income individual who has both thru-hiked the Appalachian trail and volunteered over 450 hours in the park, it is important to consider the ramifications of the proposed fee. It is necessary to also consider thru-hikers and section hikers who already have to pay the AMC in New England. The \$10.00 reservation fee and \$5.00 per night fee would amount to the most expensive over night fee on the Appalachian Trail. The 4.00 per night fee would be less than the AMC but still hard to pay for those who overnight each week.

Thank You for receiving my comments. I understand the intentions behind this proposal are well intended.

Jeff Sweeney



matthew roach
<mateoroach@gmail.com>
08/19/2011 12:15 PM

143
To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc

Subject Proposed GSMN backcountry fees

I am aware that the GSMNP needs funds. I am, however, opposeled to the fee/tax for backcountry camping that is under consideration. It is not fair to charge backpackers only. I propose charging vehicles. That would not constitute an entry fee. Only a vehicle fee. Walk in for free- but if you want to drive pay a few dollars to bring your car in. Make season or annual passes available for folk who are frequent visitors. This will encourage car pooling meaning less traffic and less need for front country rangers. I have seen personally the need for backcountry rangers and support the addition of this type of personnel. But PLEASE don't charge us for backpacking. PLEASE!

12
Coralie Bloom/GRSM/NPS
08/19/2011 12:47 PM

To: Melissa Cobern/GRSM/NPS@NPS
cc
bcc
Subject: Fw: From NPS.gov: proposed backcountry fees

I believe that your keeping track of these?

Coralie Bloom
Great Smoky Mountains National Park

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

----- Forwarded by Coralie Bloom/GRSM/NPS on 08/19/2011 12:47 PM -----



tombone@earthlink.net
08/19/2011 12:11 PM

To: GRSM_Smokies_Information@nps.gov
cc
Subject: From NPS.gov: proposed backcountry fees

Email submitted from: tombone@earthlink.net at /grsm/contacts.htm

Mailing Address
tom lundberg
4159 locust ridge rd
sevierville, tn 37876
usa

I have been a regular visitor to the gsmnp backcountry since the 1960's. I have supported gsmnp through donations and voluntary clean-up/litter removal during this time. I have considered this to be my entrance/user fee. If you choose to impose these proposed fees on me, I'll take my efforts elsewhere, such as Cherokee NF, Pisgah and Nantahala NF's, state, conservancy and private lands. My relocation will be gsmnp's loss. Many people prescribe to this perspective. These people are the volunteer backbone of this park. Listen and heed our call. The majority of your problems are in the frontcountry, but you are not seeking a financial solution through frontcountry visitors. Backcountry visitation is down. You might consider levying upon after the guide services/outfitters, who repeatedly impact a small fraction of the park.



Mark Pitt
<markapitt@comcast.net>
08/21/2011 05:04 PM

124
To grsmcomments@nps.gov, grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry proposal

I have hiked/backpacked the backcountry in the GRSM for over thirty years. In recent years have become frustrated and disappointed with the overall experience. This includes the slow and steady decline in management priorities with respect to the backcountry; therefore I am very happy to see what appears to be a renewed concern about the current situation.

For the last 5 years I have been a backcountry volunteer in the park, and have seen first hand what is involved in maintaining the trail system, and the renewed effort the park has made to recruit and train backcountry volunteers. Volunteers currently work on trails with NPS crews, and on an individual basis, in addition to patrolling the backcountry to make inventory assessments and cleaning fire rings and taking out trash from backcountry campsites.

For the last year and a half I have volunteered two days a month in the backcountry office, assisting with trip planning and making reservations. There is not a day that goes by that I do not take multiple calls from people who have had to make numerous phone calls, sometime over multiple days, just to get through.

While I am not enthusiastic about paying for something that has been free for such a long time, I think it is clear that changes need to be made.

I have backpacked throughout the country and abroad. Almost everywhere I have gone I have paid for the experience. There are entrance fees and backcountry camping fees in almost all other national parks. I paid for permits to park my car at trailheads on National Forrest land in the Pacific Northwest. I have been required to pay an entrance fee and hire a local guide in parks both here and abroad. On all occasions I did so without anger or regret, just to have the opportunity to explore, and protect, such magnificent places.

I am prepared to pay a reasonable fee, however park management must ensure that the funds will be used as stated. Once fees are implemented we can not return back to the same system.

My preference for a fee structure would be on a per person/night basis. I also think that there should be a cap on the total amount that a group would pay for one night.

Thank you for this renewed interest in the backcountry.

Mark Pitt



"Rob" <hikinrob@charter.net>

08/21/2011 05:18 PM

Please respond to
"Rob" <hikinrob@charter.net>

To <GrsmComments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject backcountry fee comments

145

Before you can implement an effective solution, you have to properly define the problem. Yes, some backcountry sites are overcrowded, ranger presence in the backcountry is non-existent, it is difficult to get backcountry reservations, etc. From my perspective, AAC and AAT volunteers handle a huge amount of trail and backcountry site routine maintenance as well as staff the backcountry office. Yet you want to charge backpackers \$500k to \$1MM per year because they need additional resources and should pay to cover that. Why is it that 9.4 million visitors should not be charged anything to drive on 384 miles of roads and use 1050 picnic sites? Do those not take any park resources to maintain or patrol? How do you justify the reservation fee for a backcountry site to be on par with a front country campground site having the expenses of restrooms, potable water, septic, trash collection, and electricity?

It is really disingenuous to make it sound like controlling backpackers is necessary to improve visitor experience. The times I've wished for a ranger on patrol in the backcountry is a tiny fraction of the times I've wanted to see one ticketing the idiots in the front country that park in the middle of Cades Cove Loop Road, let their kids run unchecked through historic areas, or try to feed bear and deer like they are pets.

I do not have a problem with a reservation system and a nominal fee to cover that. The park already uses one for campgrounds, so the incremental cost to expand it to backcountry sites should be minimal. To generate around \$.5-1 million in fees from backpackers is ridiculous. My issue is that backcountry users are being singled out to pay their own way while over 9 million other visitors suck up your resources and are not expected to contribute. The root of the problem is too many people and too many cars.

While the park may not be allowed to charge a park entrance fee on some roads, I believe it is well past time for visitors to pay "amenities fees" as the NPS calls them in other locations. If these fees decrease visitation, then that is even a greater benefit to the park. I really do not have much of an issue with the reservation system the way it is, but if I am expected to pay for rangers to check on me in the backcountry, then the other visitors need to pay for the services they are receiving too. I am not totally against a backcountry fee as long as others using the park pay their share also.

While targeting backpackers may be the easiest solution for increasing park revenue, it is not the most equitable nor does it address key underlying issues. It is a shame that you want to charge people to experience the backcountry that the park was founded to preserve and protect, but see no reason to ask millions more who treat the Smokies as a theme park to pay their way.

Sincerely,

Rob Davis
1810 Kelton Lane
Maryville, TN 37803



Sandie Walker
<slawalker@hotmail.com>

08/21/2011 11:12 PM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry Fee

Dear Superintendent Ditmanson,

As a past employee of LeConte Lodge and a regular visitor to GSMNP, I am very disappointed to hear about the proposed fees for backcountry reservations. Honestly, if someone has to be charged a fee then let it be the people that make the most impact, such as the visitors that drive into/through the park to picnic areas and leave bags full of trash in receptacles for the park service to carry out. I've looked at past budgets and was shocked to see what is spent on removing trash from the park. The park sells very little consumable goods and should not be responsible for removing said items. My friends and I have used many of the shelters along the AT and have always been respectful and thankful for the opportunity, so please do not make it more difficult for people who love and support the park and backcountry to actively access it. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sandie Walker
Chattanooga, TN

3
Coralie Bloom/GRSM/NPS
08/22/2011 07:38 AM

To Melissa Cobern/GRSM/NPS@NPS
cc
bcc
Subject Fw: From NPS.gov: GSMNP backcountry fees

one for you

Coralie Bloom
Great Smoky Mountains National Park

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

----- Forwarded by Coralie Bloom/GRSM/NPS on 08/22/2011 07:38 AM -----



clgarren4444@yahoo.com
08/19/2011 08:56 PM

To GRSM_Smokies_Information@nps.gov
cc
From NPS.gov: GSMNP backcountry fees

Email submitted from: clgarren4444@yahoo.com

Mailing Address
Claudia Garren
19 Evelake Drive
Asheville, NC 28806
USA

Dear NPS folks, I support a small fee for backcountry camping, but I do believe the visitors who come to the park in automobiles and on horseback should be held much more accountable than those who visit the backcountry. Hikers in general do not pollute the park, nor do they destroy trails like horseback riders. Horseback riders in particular should be charged the largest fees because of the awful damage they do to the trails. The \$10.00 registration fee plus another fee is too much, I believe. It becomes discriminatory because many backpackers can't afford that much for each trip. Therefore, they will have to visit less often. A flat fee such as \$5.00 per night would be appropriate. Another possibility is to give those who backpack in the park an option to buy a yearly pass. This pass could cost \$30.00 or less, then perhaps there could be an additional \$3.00 fee for each night spent in the park. I very much want the park to be safe and well-maintained. However, it must remain accessible to the people who love it. This is, after all, why it was created and why it continues to exist. Thank you for considering my opinions. Sincerely, Claudia Garren



The Kohlers
<sixkohlers@knology.net>

08/22/2011 08:35 AM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Park fees

147

Please reconsider the fees for the Park. A reasonable fee would not lock out the local people who keep the out of the way spots from overgrowing. It has been the experience of those who hike that it is the through hikers on the AT that cause the overcrowding.

Charging less will actually bring in more because it will not stop hiking. It money is the bottom line, overcharging will not help.
Carolyn Kohler



"Jewl Westphalen"
<jewl@knology.net>
08/22/2011 10:16 AM

148
To <GrsmComments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject Concerns about potential new backpacking reservations and fees

To whom it may concern in charge of a potential new required reservation and fees to backpackers.

I oppose these changes of required reservation and fees to backpackers! While citing overcrowding at reserved sites as the main reason for doing this, my belief is that most of the overcrowding results from thru-hikers on the AT during peak spring season. No reservation system will fix that. This fee structure will essentially kill back country use except for those out of state enthusiasts who want to check the GSMNP off their bucket list. And they will gravitate to the most popular sites and leave the less utilized sites virtually unused to slowly be overgrown and lost. Local folks are some of the best supporters of the back country, especially out of the way sites, and contribute regularly to maintenance and reporting. It will also seriously discourage back country camping for youth, church, and scout groups.

In addition, most of the fees will probably just go toward running the reservation service.

Don't punish the ones that take the best care of the park!

If you absolutely have to require some fee, consider a small, flat large group fee.

sincerely,

Jewl Westphalen
Knoxville resident



"jgreeneassoc tds.net"
<jgreeneassoc@tds.net>
08/22/2011 10:53 AM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject BackCountry Fees

As a regular user of the back country I strenuously object to the proposals I have seen. The original intent of no fee entrance didn't presume or assume that an individual would stay in there car. The idea was that people could use the park which I do. As for over crowding, I have not seen that to be a problem, and for policing those superfluous people, I've seen little need for that either.

I have seen over zealous park rangers or trainees criticise backpackers for having too many people in a site while they were in possession of a properly executed permit with in the allowed limits.

The three options would cost a back packer upwards to \$100 a year if charged for the privilege of making a reservation + a per night charge. There are many options to the GSMNP for backpacking where you do not have to deal with all the cars and hour long waits to approach the park.

I am aware of the difficulty and time constraints in issuing reservations and that that work is done mostly by volunteers anyway. I am aware of increasing costs for the GSMNP and limited ways to increase revenue, but none of these options are good, and all too expensive.

I may be naive, but you have had the database for Backcountry users for years and a low impact capital campaign would certainly raise additional revenue, but no effort has been made to tap the generosity of frequent users. Additionally, a modest annual pass system would be appealing to some, with a the possibility of a lifetime membership option, all tax deductible of course. There are other options available that should be explored before this tax system is imposed.

Quite often I will will use a non-reservation site, on the spur of the moment (and filing a permit) but if on line reservations are required for every night out, the spontaneity would be gone. This is simply a half thought out idea that taxes the purest users of the park and it certainly will further the decline of visitors to the park if put in place.

I've been hiking in the park for over 50 years and have logged over 2,000 miles in the park that I can account for and that is far from any record, but I have seen more mismanagement of funds than I have overcrowding in the back country. Perhaps an online system is needed, but that could have been done for less than the Stimulus money that was spent recently replacing bridges that didn't need replacing. (ACB in particular)

--
Jim Greene
Knoxville, TN (yes I am in your data base)

On a positive note, I had a reservation at LeConte Shelter for September 1st, and it is of course closed now due to bear activity.

Some one called to advise me of the change allowing me time to make other plans and I do appreciate that thoughtfulness. The problem (bears) is the problem, but it could be caused by many sources other than backpackers who are deprived, quite likely due to the actions of others. (non-backpackers)

JGA Benefit Consultants
11852 Kingston Pike
Knoxville, TN 37934

865-675-4673



"Collins, Mark"
<Mark.Collins@parsons.com>

08/22/2011 04:47 PM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry Office & Permit System Restructuring Proposal

Dear Superintendent:

I have reviewed the National Park Service's Backcountry Office and Permit System Restructuring proposal dated July 27, 2001 and have the following comments for your consideration:

1. Implementing the proposal would affect Park resources, visitor use, and visitor experience. The effects of the proposal and reasonable alternatives for meeting the purpose of and need for the proposal should be analyzed in an Environmental Assessment or other appropriate National Environmental Policy Act documentation. Full details of revenue projections and detailed budgets should be provided for public review.
2. I agree that the current situation needs improvement and recognize that improvements will cost money. However, proper enforcement of existing backcountry regulations seems like something that should be covered by baseline budgets, rather than fees that target specific users. If backcountry fees are implemented, then there should be some assurances that the funds would be used to improve the experience for the people paying the fees. For example, aggressive enforcement of permit requirements at overcrowded sites. It is bad now when non-permit holders have taken your site, but it will be worse if you paid a fee and your site is taken. Expectations of the paying users will be very high!
3. I understand that the Park does not and cannot charge general entrance fees, but it should consider frontcountry fees where possible rather than placing the entire burden on backcountry campers. The potential revenue stream is so much larger and the cost burden would be more dispersed.
4. If a backcountry fee is implemented, the revenues should not be used to fund trip planning services through the Backcountry Information Office. Backcountry users need to complete proper planning before they leave home. Plenty of trip planning information is readily available to anyone willing to put forth the effort to conduct the research.
5. I agree that reservations should be required for all sites, at least during peak season, with possibly a few exceptions for thru hikers or longer duration trips.
6. If implemented, fees should remain reasonable and as low as possible, even if the total costs of the program needs to be supplemented by other sources. Based on the alternative fee structures presented in the proposal, fees for taking my family of four camping in the backcountry would range from \$16 to \$30 for one night. In some cases, that is lower than one night in a frontcountry site. That just does not seem fair.
7. The proposed fees would place the largest financial burden on frequent backcountry users. These are most likely people that live relatively close to the

Park in Tennessee and North Carolina. Some of these frequent users are also frequent volunteers. The National Park Service should consider that some of these people might stop using the Park in favor of no-fee backpacking in surrounding National Forests. They might also shift their volunteer efforts elsewhere. Perhaps alternative fee schedules could be considered. For example, no fee for North Carolina or Tennessee residents, reduced fees for residents from these states, or the option to purchase an annual backcountry permit at a reasonable fee (i.e., 2x the cost of a onetime permit) (reservations would still be required).

I appreciate your efforts to correct backcountry management problems and thank you for taking time to consider my comments.

Sincerely,

Mark Collins
Knoxville, TN



derrickd@knology.net
08/22/2011 05:51 PM

152
To GRSMcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject From NPS.gov: proposed new backcountry reservation system

Email submitted from: derrickd@knology.net at /grsm/parknews/bc-permit-restructure.htm

Mailing Address
Derrick Douthat
1253 Halifax Rd
Knoxville, TN 37922

The proposed backcountry reservation through reserve america sounds like a killjoy to any spontaneous backpacking trip. I backpack in the backcountry 6 times a year and do find the existing reservation-system hard to deal with. But that only applies to a fraction of the backcountry sites, the rest are great for a last minute trip. I love simplicity and ease, and having to go through reserve america for every site seems not simple. It seems to me the system you have would work fine if you just had a few more people to man the phones and patrol the backcountry sites. Rather than passing that cost to the local backpackers, who use the park more than anyone, why don't you charge a small fee for every car that enters Cades Cove Loop Road. Then use that money to hire more staff. You provide local jobs and improve the backcountry reservation system. I would gladly pay \$5-\$10 each time I drove through the Loop Road, as I'm sure most others would. You would raise 100 times the revenue that way verses charging the fractionally smaller number of people who us the backcountry. My wife wanted me to add that reserve america is a pain to use and the reservation fees for booking more that one campsite gets expensive.



"Kristen Hammett, DVM"
<hammett@animalhosp.com>

08/22/2011 06:02 PM

To <GrsmComments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Support for back country fee in Great Smokies

To whom it may concern:

I support the proposed fees for use of the back country campsites in the Great Smokey Mountain National Park to help prevent overcrowding and overuse of the sites and to help pay for improved oversight and maintenance of the back country sites.

Kristen Hammett, DVM
Animal Hospital of Waynesville
91 Depot Street
Waynesville, NC 28786
828 456-9755
www.animalhosp.com



Veronica De Lara
<verodelara_07@hotmail.co
m>

08/22/2011 06:46 PM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Back country fees

Please know that I am oppsoed to the proposed fees for backcountry use in the GSMNP. I understand the need for funds. I think it would be more fair to charge cars for entry than to charge the backpackers only. They care more about the park than ANYONE. Please don't institute the proposed fees for backpackers.

Thanks, Veronica



"Hoskins, Mary Anne"
<mhoskins@utk.edu>
08/22/2011 06:52 PM

156
To "GrsmComments@nps.gov" <GrsmComments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject Backpacking fee comments

Mary Anne's random comments:

I do not support a backpacker fee for foot traffic into the park.

The number of people who backpack in the park relative to the number of park users seems small – I would venture to guess - miniscule! To make the kind of money necessary to do all the things in the proposal would require exorbitant fees to a small group of park users. Backpackers (in my opinion) put very little pressure on the resources of the park and we limit our impact by our behavior. We travel outside most of the most commonly hiked trails, we don't utilize park infrastructure (visitor centers, toilets, roads) while in the backcountry, and we aren't spending hours idling in traffic polluting the national park. We care greatly about the park, and my guess is that many of the local backpackers already support the park through Friends of the Smokies and initiatives like National Trails Day.

I probably only backpack in the park three times a year, but on no occasion have I experienced overcrowding. I haven't had difficulty making backcountry reservations either. I assume you are continuing to explore the use of volunteers in the backcountry office. Has the well run dry? My guess would be that 99% of people that go on foot more than 4 miles into the backcountry are responsible backcountry campers who don't need additional supervision. I am only speaking from my own experience. I'm wondering if the number of backcountry sites that remain on the closed list are the result of food storage issues, overcrowding, bear overpopulation, or over usage resulting in erosion (or a combination of these things).

I've always enjoyed that sense of working hard to get somewhere in the backcountry and knowing that with the hard work comes the added bonus that I saved a motel/car camping fee.

It would seem that any additional staffing for the park would be better put to use in the heavy population centers. I do support a fee for traveling the Cades Cove loop and the Motor Nature Trail. I also support a fee for horsemen using the backcountry. In my experience, even conscientious horsemen put a huge amount of stress on a campsite. Even in small numbers that don't exceed the 8 person permit limit, horses damage campsites, leave dung around the campsite, damage the trail and attract flies. Because of the ease of carrying vast amounts of gear and food, a campsite tends to really take a hit as a result of horse camping.

OK, so if I'm voted down (didn't get to attend the open forums and I suspect that there aren't enough backpackers around to speak up), I have several suggestions.

1. The fee should be structured so that backpacking still provides a decided financial incentive over car camping. The fee structures listed don't necessarily suggest that. A group of four camping on a campsite at Elkmont would pay \$17 for one night compared to \$30 in the backcountry for that same night. That really doesn't seem right.
2. Introduce heftier fees for horse camping because of the impact on the trails and the

campsites.

3. Require fees for entrance into Cades Cove and the Motor Nature Trail (install a machine for people to purchase their entrance ticket which lifts a gate for entry) so that backcountry fees are nominal.
4. Allow frequent backpackers to purchase a yearly backpacking pass.
5. Consider providing free backpacking for people who support Friends of the Smokies at some determined level, and/or allow free backpacking for locals, and/or provide free backpacking for people who volunteer at the backcountry office.

These are just some ideas. I read the rationale for the proposal and was quite surprised that this had become (or always was) an issue.

I sure do love the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and I will continue to visit no matter what the cost. Thank you for this opportunity to share my views. By the way, I haven't had a chance to discuss this with anyone, so I haven't heard any other viewpoints, and I am open to those.

Mary Anne Hoskins
Associate Director
Arts & Sciences Advising Services
313 Ayres Hall
865-974-4481



Cherry Lemonds
<lemondsch@gmail.com>

08/22/2011 07:57 PM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Charging fees for backcountry camping

I am very opposed to charging fees for back country campsites. I've lived and hiked and camped in the Smokies since the 1970's. Most of the overcrowding results from thru-hikers on the AT during peak spring season. No reservation system will fix that. This fee structure will essentially kill back country use except for those out of state enthusiasts who want to check the Great Smokey Mountains off their bucket list. They will gravitate to the most popular sites and leave the less utilized sites virtually unused and left to be grown over. Us local people are some of the best supporters of the back country, especially the out of way sites, and contribute regularly to the upkeep and maintenance. This will discourage back country camping for church, youth and scout groups. Will the people who run the reservation service benefit most from these fees? I am a member of the Friends of the Smokey Mountains, and I heartily recommend charging driving fees around Cades Cove, or some of the motor trails. But please leave the back country alone for fees. Thank you.



Joe Nickelson
<nickelsonx1@gmail.com>
08/22/2011 08:22 PM

157
To GrsmComments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry fees

Man this is not cool! The last thing we want or need is more fees and regulations. We as the users of these sites work to maintain the trails and campsites. We pay extra taxes on the gear we buy to pay for the use of lakes and lands. Why burden us more????

--

Thanks,
Joe



Richard Rini
<rini93@hotmail.com>
08/22/2011 09:30 PM

158
To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject Back Country Fee Proposal

Dear Park Superintendent:

I am somewhat concerned about the fee proposal; although not entirely against such a proposal, I would like to express my opinion.

First, I'm not sure I quit understand the fee structure and further clarification needs to be provided. As I understand it, under the first scenario (\$10.00 per reservation and \$5.00 per person) assuming that each night in the back country qualifies as a reservation; a two night trip for my wife and I will cost \$20.00 per night for a total of \$40.00. In the grand scheme of things that does not sound like a lot of money. But factor in I travel from Tampa, FL (gas) and usually stay one night in a hotel you can see where this may be a deterrent.

We average two to three trips a year to GNP. The higher cost proposal may make us rethink the amount of trips we take (just not cost effective). I'm not opposed to a fee, it just needs to be a bit more reasonable and inline. If we were to do a three night trip (and we do) in the back country our minimal cost would be (with the \$10.00 per reservation and \$5.00 per person) \$60.00!

I support the \$4.00 per person per night. I believe it is a reasonable fee (total fee). Under some of the scenarios the front country fees are cheaper than what is being proposed and that just does not make sense!

I love GSMNP, it's a treasure-trove of adventure and escape in the middle of the Southeast! My wife and I look forward to taking frequent excursions during the year. The last thing I want is to cut back on those trips because the back country fees are factored in. I'm willing to do my part by helping the park in a monetary way and pay my share but I just want you to consider what type of impact this may have on the cost conscious.

Richard A. Rini



"Erik Gerhardt"
<smokymtnhiker@charter.net
>

08/23/2011 04:58 AM

To <GrsmComments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Attempt to tax backpackers

I can't overstate my objections to GSMNP's current effort to collect fees from backpackers. Should the attempt fail, I fully expect the NPS to try once again to implement such a system in the next few years. On the previous attempt the public was told that once the updated reservation system had been paid for the fees would be rescinded. Based on my conversations with other frequent and long-time backpackers the NPS had few, if any, believers. This time around the NPS intends to contract out the reservation system, thus preventing a similar pretension. Try as it might, the NPS can't sugar-coat or gloss over the fact that it's proposing to charge an individual backpacker who wishes to spend a night in the backcountry of the Great Smokies an amount comparable to the park's overpriced frontcountry campgrounds. Once those fees are put in place, they're permanent and will only increase.

The statement on the Reservation Restructuring Proposal that other parks charging backpacking fees "offer improved services to the public" is simply baloney. My experience in a number of these national parks is that their systems and backcountry presence is no better than that of GSMNP. Such a statement has all the markings of a political appointee putting a justifying spin on what amounts to an immoral tax. The system currently in place in GSMNP reflects the spirit of public lands. The administrators in GSMNP should be dedicated to maintaining a no-fee system rather than lobbying to jump off the same bridge as other misguided units within the NPS. If truly sincere in their concern, administrators in GSMNP should give the backcountry greater priority within the annual budget and greater consistency in its management policies. Compared to the funds spent on restored vacation cottages, expanded visitor centers and road repaving, the backcountry is a sad afterthought. Here, too, we see the problem that more is never enough with government agencies. In a time of overall economic belt tightening, the NPS has instead received an influx of dollars. But still more is desired, and in a presumptive and arrogant move the NPS puts forth this plan.

I doubt there are many backpackers who spend more nights each year in the backcountry of the Great Smokies than I do, and yet it is rare when one of my calls to the backcountry office goes unanswered. Obviously, those who don't get through are the ones you're going to receive complaints or comments from, while the vast majority of backcountry users whose plans are made without a hitch are never heard from. I am proud to be a backcountry volunteer in a park that charges neither an entrance fee nor backcountry fees. It is, as I am fond of saying, the way God intended. I resent like hell the policies of some of our other national parks who long ago lost sight of the original vision. It should also be pointed out that the original vision for the Smokies forbid any entrance fees. Yet, in effect, that's what the NPS is attempting to implement here. To argue that a backpacker's use of a backcountry campsite he or she hikes to somehow exceeds and should be treated differently from the park entry and use of a family that drives to a frontcountry picnic area, utilizes the restrooms and trash receptacles and perhaps goes on a hike or visits a historic structure, is simply nonsensical. The attempt to find or create such a loophole is telling and shameful.

Erik Gerhardt
Knoxville, TN
Adopt-A-Trail: Baxter Creek
Adopt-A-Campsite: #38



Maynard Nordmoe
<admin@riversedgeca.com>
08/23/2011 07:43 AM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov, Melissa_Cobern@nps.gov
cc
bcc

Subject Proposed Back Country Fee System

I am very opposed to your proposal for imposing fees on backcountry camping both for your sakes and mine.

The fees under consideration will greatly reduce the usage of the backcountry camp sites. There has already been a documented downward trend in the usage of these sites. This will sharply accelerate that trend. Many of us local users are your greatest fans who send in reports and contribute to needed maintenance. Our usage under this new fee system will fall off precipitously. I have hiked hundreds of miles in the backcountry and have camped countless times throughout the park. I especially gravitate to the lesser utilized sites. Without regular usage, these sites will suffer attacks of overgrowth and cause more maintenance problems, not less. They could even be lost due to non-use.

I have introduced hundreds of teen-agers to backcountry camping in the park. That will end under this new fee structure. We will go elsewhere. There appears to be no consideration for school, church, or scout groups. That is a real shame.

You cite overcrowding at reserved sites as the main reason for doing this. In my experience, the only overcrowding that I have ever witnessed was the result of AT thru-hikers during peak spring season. No reservation system will fix that. I have learned to just avoid the AT during those weeks and months. The present reservation system may be a little slow at times but has never failed me yet with a little persistence. And every reservation-only-site I have ever visited (with the exception of the AT during season) has never been full or overcrowded.

This fee structure will essentially kill back country use except for those out of state enthusiasts who want to check the GSMNP off their bucket list. And they will gravitate to the most popular sites and leave the less utilized sites to fall into disuse.

The people I see really benefitting from this are the folks in California who run the reservation service for the parks. They will take the lion's share of any generated revenue. I see this system simply as a way to make up for the inability of the park to charge admission. Tax the backpackers.

The Big South Fork has a fee for back country camping, but it more accurately reflects costs to the park and is minimal. It is \$5.00 for a group up to 6 persons (and not per day) and \$10.00 for a group up to 12 persons. I could support that. But making us go through a computerized, out of state, impersonal reservation system is nauseous. I enjoy talking to your present, on-site, reservation attendants. They are knowledgeable about conditions and have a sense of ownership and pride in the park. If you are wanting to go to a California answering service, you might as well go shopping for someone in Bombay to do it for you. I am sure they could do it cheaper!

I will miss the Smokies. But make no mistake, I doubt I will be back.

Maynard Nordmoe



Maynard Nordmoe
<admin@riversedgeca.com>
08/23/2011 07:43 AM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov, Melissa_Cobern@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Proposed Back Country Fee System

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I will miss the Smokies. But make no mistake, I doubt I will be back.

Maynard Nordmoe



Brian Bock
<bbocksci@gmail.com>
08/23/2011 07:59 AM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Public Comment to the Proposed Backcountry Permit
Changes

August 22nd, 2011

Public Comment to Proposed Backcountry Permit System

I am writing this to offer my comments to the proposed backcountry camping changes that are being considered for the GSMNP. I live within a half hour's drive from the Park's Oconaluftee entrance and I have camped and backpacked in the park on several occasions over the years and look forward to my next trip. While I am not pleased to hear about the possibility of backcountry permit fees, I am hopeful that those funds will help improve the experiences of camping and hiking in the backcountry at GSMNP.

I have experienced frustration planning backpacking trips in the past because I usually waited until arriving at the park to be sure of exactly which route I would take based on which camp sites I would be using. I never tried the phone line probably because I figured it would be a hassle and be too confusing for me to plan my trip on a phone. I usually just showed up and filled out the permit based on information given at the permit box and where we wanted to go. It would certainly be nice if the guess factor could be taken out. I just hope that the proposed computer-based registration system (www.reservation.gov) will not be a big obstacle or hassle to getting out in the Smokies.

I would like to take this opportunity to offer a few of my ideas about an issue that I have encountered on nearly every trip I take in the park, multi-night backpacking and day hikes alike. This issue is the result of the consequences of severely inexperienced hikers or campers in the backcountry, which can then cause problems for other visitors, wildlife and/or generally degrade the backcountry experience. Examples of these consequences include leaving litter or abandoned gear (usually wet or ruined stuff), leaving feces unburied on the surface, leftover food tossed about a campsite or worst of all; chopping down 'living' firewood so that it can be merely charred and left lying around the camp because, surprise: Green wood doesn't burn! Maybe it's just me, but it really bothers me to see people treating our national parks like that.

It is with the goal of preventing the unprepared or ignorant from leaving giant messes for others to clean up that I think the online registration ought to have a strong educational focus. This could be done in different ways. Perhaps prospective campers would be required to pass a short quiz of a randomized set of questions about gear they need (ex. trowel and TP in a Ziploc bag) or Leave-No-Trace concepts. This could be done in some austere, official way or be done somewhat comically with cartoon characters and be interactive. Perhaps profiles of hikers could

be saved and mileage and other data about trips could be saved to make the process intrinsically rewarding for the experienced hikers instead of an annoyance. Successfully, 'passing' the educational portion would be requisite to registering for their campsites. The idea is that if a little better primed for the experience the inexperienced might be better prepared or make better choices.

Another related issue that could possibly be solved with this registration system is that first time backcountry visitors to the Smokies and possibly first-time backpackers tend to make multi-night trip itineraries that are ambitious to put it gently. Absurd is another way to put it and dangerous might also be accurate in some cases. I have often had groups stagger into camp usually late afternoon or after dark with nightmare descriptions of their day's hiking, or who ask me what I think about getting somewhere really far away because they have registered for a site there tomorrow night. My guess is that most of these first time experiences begin with lots of camping gear purchases and a visitor center map ("What is a Topo?", they ask) and end days later with a bonfire of all their brand new backpacking gear once they get home. What if this registration system had some way of 'suggesting' routes or at least educating people about what 22 mile days of hiking in the Smokies would be like? Maybe the user could enter desired routes and a description of the type of trip could be given. Or a rating of the difficulty of that route. (Ex. Did you know that the route you have entered would be difficult for advanced hikers without heavy packs to do in three days?) Or maybe it could point out that if you are planning 3 nights from point X, then here are the options for a loop trip. An interactive map could work wonders here. Perhaps a popup of the trail profile could enlighten our new backpackers that they just registered for two days of continuous climbing on horse trails rather than the half day of flat walking that they are envisioning.

While I will continue to use the backcountry trails and campsites, I am frustrated with the ignorant and unprepared who can distract me from enjoying the experience more completely. I cannot help wondering if there is not some way to improve the backcountry experience for newcomers to the activity, the experienced hikers, and the park's resources at the same time. I hope that you are successful in this effort to improve the permitting system for us all.

Thanks for reading my comments. Good luck and thank you for the work you do.



Brian C. Bock NPS backcountry comment.docx



gregg_bostick@deanfoods.co
m
08/23/2011 11:10 AM

102

To nps_director@nps.gov, grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc johnquillen@comcast.net, john.harrell@summitviewhm.com,
gdbostick@charter.net, myersmorton@comcast.net
bcc
Subject Back Country Fees In the Great Smoky Mountains National
Park

Mr. Jarvis,

The proposed fees for access to the backcountry campsites in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park seems contradictory to the charter of the park. The land was donated to and/or taken by the Federal Government and as part of that arrangement no fees are to be charged for park access. Having ancestors who were residents in what is now the GSM National Park, it is offensive that I would have to pay to play in my backyard.

It would seem there are alternatives to this proposal for the improvement of the backcountry reservation system and for additional park personnel to patrol the backcountry. Organizations such as the Friends of the Smokies have donated millions of dollars to the park through the years, as well as stimulus monies were received by the park.

I am opposed to any fee to access what has been given to the Federal Government in the Great Smoky Mountains.

Respectfully,

Gregg Bostick
Credit & Accounts Receivable Manager
Mayfield Dairy Farms, LLC
Office Phone - (423) 745-2151, ext. 72428

cc: The Honorable John J. Duncan, Jr., Tennessee 2nd District Representative



beemandave@charter.net
08/23/2011 12:18 PM

1123
To GrsmComments@nps.gov
cc share9622@gmail.com
bcc
Subject back country camping fee

I am a senior citizen back country camper using the hazel creek trail camps. I object to the introduction of a camping fee for campers on the Fontana lake side because of lack of access to the park on the North Carolina side without paying a private firm a fee to be ferried across the lake. This cost, combined with a 'camping fee' discourages use by North Carolina residents to enjoy the wilderness conditions of the park and being able to explore the history of this wonderful place. Road access is not necessary, or the issue here, but paying a fee to stay a few days alone, without the throngs of visitors like the Tennessee side, should not be considered. A fee to camp in back country is the same as an entry fee to access the park which is against the spirit of the original intent not to charge to enter GSMNP. Efforts should be made to encourage campers and day users to 'To keep it clean' and take it back out when they leave. Posting of camping rules and bear warnings at campsites should be addressed. Information and education about bears is the best way to avoid a bear incident.

I have never met anyone in this area with a bad attitude or bad manners. Unfortunately there are those who abuse the privilege and should be monitored.

Thank you,
David Hare
Arden, NC



Josh Hix
<josh_hix@yahoo.com>
08/23/2011 05:37 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject

I would like to comment on the proposal to charge for backcountry reservations. I first read about this a few weeks ago on Whiteblaze.net.

I've got a great deal of experience hiking in the Smokies. My Dad took me on one of my first trips in the early 70's. I remember when there two shelters at Ibewater Springs and Silers Bald and everything was first come/first served.

Many years ago, a couple of my Dad's friends talked about the end of the world coming when the Smokies went to a permit/reservation system. Frankly, I felt the same way when I read about the new proposal but I have calmed down since then.

I want to say that I have never had a problem making reservations; it may have taken many tries but I have always gotten them on that same day. I've never met a hiker with a dog in the backcountry or on the AT. I find campsite and trail destruction done by horsepackers and fishermen. I have never had an issue with overcrowding at a campsite or shelter.

I like the idea of an online reservation system but I don't like using an outside contractor. There is a very fine line between charging so much that you drive hikers away and charging enough to fund so called improvements. Personally, I have no problems paying \$10-\$20 per permit. I do have problems paying a fee for a permit/person/day but I feel that horsepackers and fishermen should due to the destruction stated above.

Thank you very much for allowing me to give input. The Smokies are my favorite place to hike and I hope to continue hiking for many years to come. You are put in a hard position to generate funds for improvements...."Dang if you do and Dang if you don't!"

Josh Hix
josh_hix@yahoo.com



wahartjr
<wahartjr@bellsouth.net>
08/23/2011 07:15 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Proposed Registratiuon and Fee Structure

To Whom It May Concern:

I support the computerized backcountry reservation system and the charging of user fees in the beleif that this Great Smoky Mountains National Park and is in the best interest of backcountry mangagement.

Sincerely,

William A. Hart, Jr.
25 Sourwood Lane
Fletcher, NC 28732
(828) 684-7976



Geoff Milanovich
<geoff.milanovich@gmail.com>

08/24/2011 02:42 AM

To GrsmComments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry Camping fee

Hello,

I think a fee is fine if it really does all go to backcountry maintenance and rule enforcement. I would propose \$5 per person per night, perhaps with some way to charge AT thru hikers less. Also, I would propose \$10 per horse per night. Horses cause more trail damage and therefore should be charged more.



john griffith
<john.m.griffith@gmail.com>

08/24/2011 12:59 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Proposed Backcountry fee structure

First, I want to take this opportunity to thank you for the valuable service that your entire park service staff provides. I love GSMNP and really appreciate the park itself and the work that all of you do to keep available to the public.

I just read about the fee proposals and would like to suggest that the fees be made seasonal. I backpack in the park during fall, winter, and spring, and during the colder months there are rarely any overcrowding issues, especially on the non-reservable sites.

Thank you,

John Griffith



"David Kaz"
<DKaz@controltechnology.co
m>

08/24/2011 01:24 PM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject against the back country fee

Park Superintendent,

I am against the proposed back country fee for the Great Smoky Mountain Park. Keep the Smokies free of a back country tax.

Sincerely,

Dave Kaz

Knoxville, TN



"Sally Worden"
<sallyw@ci.gatlinburg.tn.us>

08/24/2011 02:38 PM

Please respond to
<sallyw@ci.gatlinburg.tn.us>

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry Permit System

My hiking buddies and I are pleased that the park is considering greater supervision of all backcountry sites. We have no problem paying four or more dollars for camping privileges in areas that are generally supervised. I have been in many overcrowded shelters with people who have no permit. The situation can become unpleasant quickly. We are against however converting the reservation system to Recreation.gov. By phone, one often can not get through to a real person that speaks **REAL** English. Then when you finally do get the reservationists, they have no clue about the GSMNP, and can not answer questions pertinent to the specific area such as available water, bear activity, current temperatures, etc. Why not charge a little more and provide the reservation service for backcountry in-house with LOCAL, English speaking, informed, and helpful staff?



"Hike Inn"
<hikeinn@graham.main.nc.us
>

08/24/2011 01:28 PM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Back-Country restructuring Proposal

Jeff and Nancy Hoch
THE HIKE INN
3204 Fontana Road
Fontana Dam, NC 28733
828-479-3677

Dale Ditmanson
Superintendent
Great Smoky Mountains National Park
107 Park Headquarters Road
Gatlinburg, TN 37738

Dear Superintendent Ditmanson,

We would like to comment on the Back-Country Restructuring Proposal (please see attachment). My wife Nancy and I have owned and operated THE HIKE INN in Fontana Dam for the past nineteen years. We are a hiker service providing accommodations and transportation exclusively for hikers. A very large percentage of our business involves hikers accessing the G.S.M.N.P. back-country. Over the years we feel that we have had an excellent working relationship with the Park Service and value this relationship greatly. We also feel this is because of our enforcement of Park policies and regulations as well as the positive interaction between Park Service Employees with ourselves and our guests. Please understand that our comments are given with the utmost respect to you and your staff and in no way are we criticizing the Park Service or it's employees by offering these comments and suggestions. While it's normal procedure to seek public input concerning changes in Park policies and regulations, we feel a great wealth of information has been overlooked by not contacting the several long-standing hiker services who deal with back-country issues daily. On that note, we hope after reading our comments that you will address this by assigning one of your staff to contact and meet with those of us who are not just responding from the heart, but also from those of us responding with experience and facts. By working together and improving communication, it will provide a more educated, compliant and most of all, an enjoyable experience for our back-country visitors. Thank you in advance for your acknowledgement of back-country problems and we look forward to continuing working closely with the Park Service for years to come.

Sincerely

Jeff and Nancy Hoch
THE HIKE INN



Comments on the Back.doc

no cost

Comments on the Back-Country Restructuring Proposal

- 1) After reading the proposal in depth, we think it's acknowledging a problem with the current system however it was not fully thought out nor is it comprehensive enough to address all the issues creating the problems.
- 2) Creating a fee schedule for back-country admittance and not for overall Park entrance is short-sighted and discriminatory. We understand the pressure applied to the Park Service to maintain Hwy. 441 to remain open in the winter. Is this not the same pressure to keep the Park service from charging an entrance fee? Also in simple calculations, the monies raised through a back-country fee alone will not cover the expanded costs in the proposal.
- 3) If a back-country fee is put in place, it should be only for the shelters on the A.T. and the several sites that are already reserved sites which create the bulk of the problems. We do not agree with converting all sites to reservation only as the problems are confined mainly to a few high use areas. The monies from that fee should be used to enlarge, maintain and patrol/enforce these areas.
- 4) There are three National Trails in the Park, however, only the A.T. allows long-distance hikers special privileges. We think those privileges should be extended to hikers on the BMT and MTST also.
- 5) Nowhere in the proposal does it address horses in the back-country or the damage they create.
- 6) Comparing the G.S.M.N.P. to Western parks is like comparing apples and oranges. Our Park is unique and different in many ways. What works out west doesn't necessarily mean it will work here or that it will be an improvement. Let us not forget the strings attached of never an entrance fee when the Park was created.
- 7) Currently, knowledge and policy enforcement seems to vary depending on who you deal with.

no court

- 8) Not everyone has internet access or cell phones with internet capabilities. By going to recreation.gov, you will need a credit or debit card which again, many people don't have. This also creates money handling issues not only online but at physical locations also.

The previous comments are made in an attempt to address problems not just in the proposal but in the back-country system itself. We would like to further add the following as possible solutions to the current problems within the system.

- 1) Focus Park resources on education and enforcement with the shelters on the A.T. and the other three or four areas that create over 90% of the problems.
- 2) Continue the current system full time (8-5, seven days a week) with back-country reservations. Add an additional back-country planner on a separate phone line (8-5 M-F). We have found that the current system works fine when hikers plan ahead and make their reservations early. The problem is with last minute plans and hikers failing to plan properly. The entire back-country process shouldn't be penalized and overhauled because of a few hikers who plan poorly or just show up. We've also found a large number of hikers that pose as long-distance hikers or who don't think rules apply to them. These are the very ones that need to be fined and removed from the park. By enforcing the current fines that would create extra monies to provide the changes we have outlined.
- 3) Enlarge heavily used sites and charge a fee for cost recovery, maintenance and enforcement.
- 4) Expand the 30 day maximum reservation policy to 45 or even 60 days thereby allowing for better planning.

- 170 cont
- 5) Seek input from the long-term established hiker services such as ours to help improve the current system. We are on the front lines of this situation and would be more than willing to cooperate and assist the Park Service in any way possible.

In summary, we feel the G.S.M.N.P. has an adequate system in place to provide the reservations. The short comings are in education, planning information and enforcement of current policies and regulations. We do not see a need to penalize all back-country users because of a few problem areas that can be addressed and corrected. We especially feel that entrance into the back-country is a privilege not a right, and as with most privileges we are granted, they come with an inherent responsibility to the user. We urge you to take a step back, maybe two steps, to correct and expand on this proposal to ensure it will accomplish not only what's best for the Park, but for the millions of people that enter it's boundaries yearly. By doing so, hopefully this will not be a subject needing to be addressed again in the near future. Thank you for allowing us to share in this process.

Jeff and Nancy Hoch
THE HIKE INN



"Rob McKeehan"
<mckeehanr@bellsouth.net>
08/24/2011 09:09 PM

171
To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc

Subject Backcountry fee

I wanted to write to say that I definitely support the fee proposals for backcountry camping. I know it takes extra effort to maintain the sites and this would allow them to be that much better. It could only improve my experiences there and help to prevent some not so desirable ones. The proposal seems very reasonable, and I would be happy to pay the fee.

thank you,
Robert S. McKeehan
Knoxville, TN



J Loveday
<jveday@gmail.com>
08/24/2011 10:08 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry Office and Permit System Restructuring
Proposal

172
8/24/11
JTB

Dear Superintendent:

Attached you shall find a letter relevant to the Backcountry Office and Permit System Restructuring Proposal.

Regards,



Joel A. Loveday GSMNP_Letter.pdf



J Loveday
<jveday@gmail.com>
08/24/2011 10:12 PM

173
To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry Office and Permit System Restructuring
Proposal

Dear Superintendent:

Below you shall find a letter relevant to the Backcountry Office and Permit System Restructuring Proposal.

Regarding Backcountry Office and Permit System Restructuring Proposal

August 24, 2011

Park Superintendent

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

107 Park Headquarters Road

Gatlinburg, TN 37738

Dear Superintendent:

In response to the aforementioned proposal, I would like to gain Park Management's perspective on several pertinent issues:

1. Has Management sufficiently considered options for converting non-reserved sites to reserved sites?
2. What is the current number of backcountry staff (i.e., rangers in the backcountry and in the Backcountry Information Office) being paid?

2.1. What is the annual expense associated with the current level of said staffing?

3. What annual increase in expenditures is necessary for Management's proposal to be successfully implemented?

3.1. What do those expenditures truly provide? (Please itemize).

4. If Management fulfills the public's desire to "see more rangers in the backcountry," will increased ranger visibility be seasonal, during peak visitation, or dispersed evenly throughout the calendar year?

4.1. How many additional man-hours does Management propose to achieve the goals set forth?

It is my opinion for Management's proposal to be successful, the fee structure for backcountry sites must generate sufficient revenue to offset the cost associated with the burden of hiring additional personnel.

5. How many backcountry sites does Management seek to levy fees on?

5.1. How many individuals per site does that equate to annually?

5.2. Is that realistically going to generate sufficient revenue?

6. What is Management's estimated contractor cost for the reservation system on an annual basis?

6.1. Is the contractor, indeed, recreation.gov?

6.2. Has Management solicited bids from additional contractors?

7. How is Management's proposal similar to and different from other National Parks with similar systems?

8. How can Management improve upon existing National Park fee-for-site reservation systems?

I appreciate Management's candid responses to my inquiries. If the proposal has been designed and drafted to address the shortcomings cited, this presents Management an opportunity to constructively impact the Park. If, however, Management's proposal serves as proxy for some undisclosed, immoderate agenda, I hope it is met with resistance and defeat.

Regards,

Joel A. Loveday



"John Kieffer"
<jkieffer@bellsouth.net>

08/24/2011 10:44 PM

Please respond to
<jkieffer@bellsouth.net>

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject RE: Proposal for backcountry fees

To whom it may concern,

I am very concerned about the possibility of instituting reservation fees for overnight stays in the Smokies backcountry and would like to express my strong opposition to this proposal for a number of reasons.

First of all, as an avid backpacker and frequent visitor to the Smokies, I struggle with understanding why these fees are needed. In my many trips in the park, I have never had an unpleasant experience which led me to think more Rangers were needed in the backcountry. There is already a no fee reservation system in place where there are instances of overcrowding. It seems the only reason we are suggesting the fee is to raise additional monies for the park from the visitors that have the least impact.

Secondly, only a very small number of the park's 9 million visitors enter the backcountry. I would venture to say that most do not even get out of their car. Adding fees and increasing law enforcement in the backcountry seems like a waste of resources. If there is a need to generate more revenue to support the park, why are we placing the burden on the small percentage of those visitors that use the backcountry? There is currently no entrance fee into the Smokies, unlike most every other National Park. It would seem to make more sense to consider an entrance fee that can be shared by all the park's visitors instead of a few.

Thirdly, most individuals who enjoy the backcountry are more likely to be good stewards of the land and environment. Typically backpackers volunteer for trail maintenance, campsite rehabilitation and help in Search and Rescue. Many backpackers help the Rangers by alerting them to backcountry issues which save them valuable time and resources. It would be unfortunate to place an unfair portion of the parks financial burden squarely on the shoulders of the backpackers. Perhaps a fee to enter Cades Cove loop and other high-traffic areas for out of state visitors would better suit the park's needs?

Finally, I hope you will carefully consider this issue before imposing a restrictive and costly burden on the backcountry visitors to the Smokies. Aside from being an avid backpacker, I am a small business owner and I care about the potential message that this fee increase sends to all the potential visitors to this region. The addition of more regulation and more cost will certainly hurt the tourism industry and as a result, will hurt those businesses which depend on the income from those visitors.

Thank you,

John Kieffer
jkieffer@bellsouth.net

404-216-2124



David Capen
<dcapen@uvm.edu>

08/25/2011 10:26 AM

Please respond to
dbat10@comcast.net

To grsmcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry Permit Restructuring Proposal

To: Park Management, Great Smoky Mountain National Park

RE: Backcountry Office & Permit System Restructuring Proposal July 27, 2011

Dear GSMNP Management,

I have read your proposal and wish to express my opinions to you on this proposal.

To begin I think the period for comments should be extended and additional public meetings held in more surrounding communities, specifically Knoxville, TN. To restrict the time for comments to one month after the release of the proposal and hold only 2 public meetings both of which were held is not fair to avid backcountry users such me.

I would like to see another public meeting held in Knoxville at a time and place convenient to the users, not park personnel. The only meeting that I could have possibly made was the one held at park headquarters on Thursday. The meeting ran from 5:30 PM to 7:30 PM. Come on, I work, in Knoxville, and getting to the meeting and have time to be heard bordered on unlikely.

Let me continue. I have been using the backcountry for about 30 years. Yes, I have experienced overcrowding at popular sites and shelters. Perhaps I've been lucky. It's happened a couple of times and usually it was easy to accommodate extra campers. Sharing bear hangers or boxes is not impossible. Most backcountry campers who I have experienced are more than happy to work with fellow campers. I have never been at a shelter where those with reservations did not have a bunk. In short, it's not a problem for most. I'm sure you have heard from the whinny babies who do not share. As for other violations, I have never seen a dog in a site. I'm not claiming that does not happen. I have experienced trash left by others, and usually have enough room to pack it out.

Unless you plan on permanent campsite monitors, these violations will continue to occur occasionally. Your proposal does not state plans for permanent monitors. It does speak of additional backcountry rangers. I assume that they will have radios and be responsible for checking permits and verifying that the permit is valid by giving them capabilities to go online or communicate with someone who can verify the person is registered. I don't see this as a problem in the sites where reservations are required. I do see it as unnecessary intrusion into my experience if I am stopped on the trail and asked to produce a permit. In winter I often hike with a bedroll in case of an accident in cold weather conditions. I would not have a permit and the ranger may think I will be camping "illegally". Would I be arrested or detained on his suspicions over such a minor infraction when I was not actually camping? I don't like the idea.

That raises more questions. How will violators of the proposed reservation system be handled in the backcountry? How will I be able to provide proof of compliance if I made my reservation by a cell phone and could not print a confirmation and will not have cell service in the park?

I do applaud the online reservation system for shelters and popular sites, namely those which currently require reservations. Perhaps one reason you hear of unregistered campers showing up at these sites is simply because the current reservation system does not work. I have changed my plans more than once to stay at another site because I could not get through to the backcountry reservations ranger by telephone. The current sites which do not require reservations should remain so. Online self registration, is a good idea, and probably will be adequate to prevent overcrowding. If the online registration web site allows one to see how many others are already registered, I suspect most would simply seek a less populated site.

With any reservation system, there should be exemptions for those who cannot get to their reserved site. I thought there has been a tradition of accommodating through-hikers along the AT. Likewise bad weather simply may prevent a backpacker from making it to his reservation and he must choose to stay at a closer site. Many of us have made the mistake of overestimating how far we can go in a day, choosing that site that is simply too far.

As for fees, I see no justification in the proposal. It's not equitable to require a \$10 or even a \$4 fee per person per reservation for backcountry backpackers when you charge \$14 per reservation for campgrounds and \$20 or \$25 for horse camp reservations, neither appear limit the number of people on the reservations. Both campground and horse camp sites offer more amenities (toilets, showers, trash pickup) than offered to backcountry campers (none).

As one who in some years has backpacked 12 to 20 nights per year. I think your proposed fee needs alternatives, namely a season pass with a cost commensurate with the cost of services provided. Any fee system should be commensurate with the costs of the services provided. Robbing Peter to pay Paul, namely using excess backcountry fees to pay for front country services is unfair.

Thank you for considering my opinions and requests.

Sincerely,

Don Batten
215 Harley Dr.
Knoxville, TN 37919
(865) 216-6813



Martin Hunley
<mchunley@yahoo.com>
08/25/2011 12:02 PM

176
To "grsmcomments@nps.gov" <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject No to backcountry fees.

Mr. Jarvis,

The proposed fees for access to the backcountry campsites in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park seems contradictory to the charter of the park. The land was donated to and/or taken by the Federal Government and as part of that arrangement no fees are to be charged for park access. Having ancestors who were residents in what is now the GSM National Park, it is offensive that I would have to pay to play in my backyard.

It would seem there are alternatives to this proposal for the improvement of the backcountry reservation system and for additional park personnel to patrol the backcountry. Organizations such as the Friends of the Smokies have donated millions of dollars to the park through the years, as well as stimulus monies were received by the park.

I am opposed to any fee to access what has been given to the Federal Government in the Great Smoky Mountains.

Respectfully,

Martin Hunley
Cell # (845) 505-1671
<http://www.facebook.com/trip.of.lifetime>
<http://www.tripofalifetimephotos.com>



james hembree
<deaconjimbob@bellsouth.net>

08/25/2011 01:06 PM

To: GrsmComments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject: Fee proposal to Smokies National Park back packers

Dear Sir,

The three fee proposals you are putting on Smokies National Park backpackers is usarp. It will seriously discourage back country camping for youth, church, and scout groups: to enjoy God's unspoiled beauty. As well, to enjoy the wilderness for a few days like John Muir want people too.

If you have to put a fee on back country camp site (with I think is usarp), why not make it \$5.00 for a group to 6 persons (and not per day) and \$10.00 for a group up to 12 persons (and not per day).

From a concern Smokies back packer.
James Robert Hembree



Art Fisher
<artfisher.af@gmail.com>
08/25/2011 01:45 PM

To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry reservation proposal

From a user perfect I've had no crime experienced in 47 years of backcountry camping. So patrols do not make sense. In only about a dozen campsites does a reservation system make sense. 4 those limited sites a 4 dollar per person fee might be acceptable. Not for any others.

Please understand the public is very upset about the growth of government in any sector.

Art Fisher
Pigeon Forge



"wisember"
<wisember@yahoo.com>
08/25/2011 02:15 PM

179
To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject No to mandatory fees and reservations

Having read the proposal and attended the meeting at the park's headquarters on Thursday August 18, I would like to express my disapproval for the implementation of a new reservation and fee structure for backcountry use.

While the proposed new fee and reservation system may be implemented, I find the process and conclusion to be lacking on several levels.

The notification of the proposed changes was not publicized in a timely manner. My first awareness of the proposed changes was not until late July and the end date for input was less than one month later. For such a radical departure from past park policy, this is a short window to solicit responses.

The lack of input by the backcountry users in developing options was also quite disappointing. Rather than seeking the input in formulating ideas and solutions, we the park users were left with an explanation rather than a request for input. The entire framework was in place prior to any participation by the park's users.

The notion that the level of complaints by backcountry users is significant enough to completely alter the existing system is also not born out by any of the frequent users that I've queried. I would contend that the proposed changes involving required reservations and fees would result in a less user friendly solution than what presently exists. This is an example of a proposed cure being more harmful than the condition it is supposed to address.

Presently, over half of the backcountry inventory is not even involved in the reservation system, nor does the volume of use warrant such an inclusion. I can only see folding the presently non-reserved sites into the reserved inventory as a means of capturing revenue while receiving little in value added for the new inconvenience and expense. The weight of the changes by far exceeds the proposed benefits.

I do wish that more input was solicited from the onset rather than a cursory level of inclusion after a de facto conclusion had been developed. Rather than seeking out suggestions on how to more efficiently utilize the existing resources and find ways to work smarter or even soliciting greater volunteer participation, we're only left the option of submitting an email to say how much we dislike or like was already developed. This can only serve to disenfranchise some of the most adamant proponents of the park.

Again, I can only express dissatisfaction and disappointment with the way that this process has taken place for such a larger departure from a policy as old as the park itself.

I have enjoyed many opportunities to experience the backcountry in the GRSM. I've also worked

with a number of organizations to volunteer my time for trail maintenance and have always made it a point to pack out other people's trash. With the proposed addition of fees and required reservations, I would have to consider redirecting my outings to more affordable areas and devoting more time and effort to preserving them. I'll probably continue to visit the park, but it will most likely be dayhiking which will hopefully remain free.

In the mean time, I would encourage you to reevaluate the proposed changes. I have contacted my member of Congress and my Senators to express the same view.

Regards,

Walter Isenberg
Knoxville, Tennessee



hwc@windstream.net
08/25/2011 03:21 PM

180
To GRSMcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject From NPS.gov: Backcountry Fees

Email submitted from: hwc@windstream.net at /grsm/parknews/bc-permit-restructure.htm

Mailing Address

Henry W. Chambers
86 Whoop-De-Doo Rd
Hiawassee, GA 30546
USA

I oppose any utilization fee that singles out any one particular user group, such as backpacker fees for overnight camping. Trails are not just utilized by backpackers, but by fishermen, wildflower enthusiasts, day hikers, and others. It is also a shame that front-country hikers are paying more expensive fees at GSMNP than at other parks or other similar federal facilities such as TVA and USDA-FS campgrounds, which often now have power and water available at the campsite.



"Al Smith"
<tnhiker@earthlink.net>
08/25/2011 03:22 PM

181
To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc "Janice Henderson" <firepink@earthlink.net>, "Al Smith's
Gmail" <tnhiker865@gmail.com>
bcc

Subject Comments Regarding GSMNP's Backcountry Office & Permit
System Restructuring Proposal dated July 27, 2011

Al Smith and Janice Henderson's Comments Regarding GSMNP's Backcountry Office & Permit System Restructuring Proposal July 27, 2011

URL Link to Original proposal: [Original Smokies Proposal](#)

Date submitted: 8/25/2011

Last date for comments: 8/26/2011

Submitted via Email to: grsmcomments@nps.gov

Problem Identification by the NPS--Synopsis followed by our comments

1. ***Complaints about the amount of time and effort it takes for visitors to get a backcountry reservation and/or acquire backcountry planning information.***

- We agree that it is sometimes difficult to make contact with the backcountry office via telephone. Also many times when we've visited personally, there were no NPS staff available in the backcountry office--notwithstanding the fact that during those times I discovered plenty of NPS staff available in the visitor center manning the information desk. Furthermore, there is no longer a backcountry information office at the Oconaluftee visitor center--hikers on the NC side must travel all the way to Gatlinburg to get an in-person briefing.

2. ***"Frequent" requests from the public that more rangers be provided in backcountry areas to address problems such as dogs on trails, and permit and camping violations.***

- We've each hiked thousands of miles in the Smokies (all of the trails at least once, most of them two or three times and many of them several times) and have camped in the front country and backcountry scores of times over the past 20 years.
 - a. Rarely have we seen problems in the backcountry with dogs on trails and we've never seen an attended dog on a trail more than 1 mile from the trailhead.
 - b. We've only seen flagrant camping violations in two locations in the Smokies--Hazel Creek trail and Forney Creek trail; the worst was along Hazel Creek trail in 2006 and again in 2007 where hikers are allowed to use carts to ferry in equipment and supplies

far in excess of what would be expected for a backcountry camping experience. We documented that problem with the NPS at the time and a subsequent change to the park's special regulations was made to address the use of carts along Hazel Creek trail. Unfortunately, use of carts was not forbidden (only the use of horse-drawn carts was banned) and the problem with excessive food & equipment being ferried into various campsites along Hazel Creek trail still exists today. This creates significant problems with compliance with food storage regulations and makes camping in sites along Hazel Creek more perilous for all hikers. Use of carts and pack animals should be banned on all trails leading to backcountry campsites. See my story "Backpacking Fifth Avenue Style along Hazel Creek". The violation on Forney Creek trail was in an illegal campsite only about 1/2 mile from the lake boundary where we found the after effects of a camping expedition that included lots of trash (much more than we could haul out in one trip), discarded camping supplies (propane bottles, cookware, sleeping bags, clothing, etc.) and unconsumed food.

c. Complaints about permit violations must surely be restricted to those staying overnight in shelters along the AT where it has (always?) been the case that AT thru-hikers don't have to have a permit to stay overnight. Even though non thru-hikers with reservations are supposed to have priority on shelter space, the practical fact is that shelters along the AT are first-come, first-served when it comes to securing space to lay your sleeping bag during the season for AT thru-hiking. No permit system will change this and we already have a trail patrol system in place (AT Ridgerunners).

3. *Public desire for more NPS personnel in Backcountry Information Office to provide trip planning services.*

- Problem #3 is just a restatement of problem #1. We agree that a full-time NPS staffer should be on hand during the stated 8 am - 6 pm period each day to address backcountry inquiries. With 800 miles of hiking trails in the park it seems to us a misallocation of park service human resources to not dedicate staff for this purpose.

4. *"Frequent" usage beyond design capacity of non-reservation backcountry campsites which results in food storage violations and subsequent problems with dangerous wildlife encounters.*

- Problem #4 is really much the same as problem #2 and our comments above for #2 address our views on that topic.

5. *Inability to "reliably" notify backcountry users of closed backcountry sites which in turn may result in more risk of injury or death to those visitors and/or wildlife.*

- We do not agree with the premise that a backcountry reservation system for all backcountry camping sites would result in a significant improvement in the ability to communicate the sudden closures of backcountry campsites to scheduled users. Frequently it is the case that backcountry hikers are not available via telephone during a period of up to several days before a planned overnight hike in the Smokies. It would be better to require backcountry users to make last minute verification of the status of backcountry campsites via methods which might include the bulletin board outside the backcountry planning office, the NPS website or some type of automated telephone message system (such as one with the ability to accept input of specific backcountry site numbers).

- ***We suggest there is another "problem" Smokies park managers should address and that is the difference in adverse impact upon trails and camping facilities between visitors on horses vs. hikers on their own two feet.*** Any reservation or permit system fee you establish should include higher fees for horse use since that usage results in significantly more adverse impact upon the trail and backcountry facilities. During our times on the trails, we've observed that horse riders frequently pack-in more food and leave more waste than mere hikers. This creates a much greater problem when it comes to food storage and campground clean-up. Anyone who regularly hikes trails used by horses and then hikes on hiker-only trails can attest to this fact as being readily apparent.

Al Smith & Janice Henderson's Comments Regarding Proposed Solution and Outcomes

Proposed Solutions & Outcomes Proposed by NPS followed by Al Smith & Janice Henderson's Comments

1. Contract with Recreation.gov for online and call-in reservation services for all backcountry campsites in the Smokies. Park studies suggest that almost 100% of the reservations would then be made via Recreation.gov with only a few requiring input at a Backcountry Information Office in the Smokies.

- We like the concept of being able to see online the real-time campsite and hiking shelter availability.
- Freeing-up NPS personnel from reservation-only calls would be a good thing as long as they remain available to provide those "high quality" trip planning services in person and via phone instead of solely manning a visitor desk or engaging in other functions as is now apparently the case in the Sugarlands office. Unfortunately, it has been our experience that "high quality" trip planning often suffers when ill-informed personnel engage in briefings for backcountry hikers. A classic example we recall clearly involved a family group we met at the "tunnel" on the "Road-to-Nowhere" who were about to hike the full length of Forney Creek trail. They'd been briefed that morning by a park ranger (volunteer?) at Oconaluftee(?) but didn't have a clue that the route would include several (approximately 9) unbridged stream crossings--some of which would have been above knee-deep levels. Their group included small children and none of them were prepared for such an experience.
- Recreation.gov is not a substitute for a real person with specific knowledge of Smokies trails. The Recreation.gov organization handles hundreds of sites with an almost infinite variety of conditions. There is no way a briefing sheet system can be used to provide reliable information on something as complex as a hiking trip involving one or more trails in the Smokies. People requiring that amount of detail will still be looking to contact the Backcountry Information Office.
- Based upon current fee schedules, this service will cost backcountry campers \$10 per reservation just for the administrative processing fee collected by Recreation.gov and another \$11 for changes to or cancellation of any reservation made thru this system.
- **Why not move the backcountry planning office to the main lobby of the visitor**

center(s) where backcountry staffers could brief both backcountry hikers and other visitors such as day hikers and automobile tourists? It would be a much wiser use of human resources.

2. Most other parks with similar backcountry operations charge between \$10 and \$30 per reservation, and many have additional per person or per person, per night fees.

- We strongly disagree with this summary. Only two parks similar to ours charge any kind of a fee for advance reservations and both of those offer free reservations for walk-ins. All four parks similar to ours in the continental U.S. offer free permits for backcountry camping. Here are the four specific examples of parks we believe to have "similar" backcountry operations as the Smokies:
 - Glacier NP. 700+ miles of trails. Reservation fee: None. Permit fee: None
 - Yellowstone NP. 1100 miles of trails! Reservation fee: \$20 for reservations 48 hours or more in advance. Walk-in reservations (within 48 hours of trip start) are FREE. Permit fee: None.
 - Yosemite NP. 750 miles of trails. Reservation fee: \$5 plus \$5/person for advance reservations. No charge for changes. Walk-in reservations: Free (for trips beginning up to one day prior to the wilderness (backcountry) trip). Permit fee: None.
 - Shenandoah NP. 500+ miles of trails. Reservations not required. Permit fee: None
- The online reservation system is a service we'd be glad to pay to have at our fingertips, however, \$10 per reservation seems steep. How about \$5 per reservation?
- We think that Recreation.gov should not benefit to the tune of \$10 per reservation, without restriction or exception, for all reservations made to use backcountry campsites in the Smokies.
 - What about last minute walk-ins?--shouldn't they be exempt from a reservation fee as is the case in each of the other four large parks we included in our comments for comparison?
 - What about an annual pass or lifetime pass for backcountry camping in the Smokies? The annual or lifetime pass option would be attractive for locals like us who are retired and living on a fixed income but desire to continue to use the backcountry areas extensively.
 - A pre-paid pass could also serve as a reward to be given to park volunteers, employees, key donors, etc.
 - Again, we know that the third-party reservation system managers will not like the concept of a "free" or reduced fee for holders of annual or lifetime passes. It is very important that this provision be included in any negotiations for a contract.

3. Create a cost recovery fee structure for reservations that will generate revenue to cover both the contractor cost of the reservation system and support an increased NPS presence in the Backcountry Information Office and in the park's backcountry.

- Wow. That was a pretty expensive tally of services you've listed there. Just how expensive would it be to do all of those things? We suggest you've either severely underestimated the expense to hire enough people to do what you want or you've been way too optimistic about how many hikers will be paying those backcountry fees once you implement a mandatory reservation and permit system for all backcountry camping.
- We think you run the risk of adopting a system based upon incorrect usage projections only to find after a year of operation that you need to double or triple the permit fees to

meet your original revenue goals. Already you're proposing a fee system that would cost two people about \$30 for a two night stay at one campsite in the Smokies. If they overnigheted at two sites instead of one the fee would be \$40 for two people. That is pretty close to outrageous. If after a year of operation you find you need to double or triple permit costs from the \$5/night per person levels, such a move would, for many people, make backcountry camping untenable due to the high cost for a reservation and permit.

- We considered how much it would cost you to add two experienced staffers for the backcountry office function. By our estimate, you'd have to allocate at least \$80,000 per year to get two full-time staffers with enough experience to be backcountry planning qualified. How about park rangers for trail patrols? Darn, we don't think you've really thought this out when it comes to how many rangers it would take to provide anything more than a token presence in the backcountry. **There is a viable alternative to having park rangers patrol backcountry trails and campsites: Use Volunteers.**

- You should recruit, train and equip seasonal volunteer "Wilderness Guards" like are used by the U.S. Forest Service to patrol wilderness trails all across the U.S. The cost to the government is minimal and those dedicated volunteers greatly enhance the overall experience for most hikers with whom they come in contact--plus the added benefit is a much improved voluntary compliance with park/wilderness regulations. And the cost? A pittance compared with the cost of hiring full-time park rangers.

- Before you dismiss the problems with recruiting and retaining volunteers, you should make a detailed comparison of the overall process used by the NPS vs. that used by agencies such as the USFS and even private agencies such as the Student Conservation Association (SCA). One of us (Al Smith) has volunteered for both of those groups and even *considered* being a volunteer for the park service here in the Smokies (until he got the 3 lbs. of paper forms required to apply). Further, we've had the opportunity to interact with some of the volunteers in the Smokies and almost universally they report feeling underappreciated, overworked and oftentimes assigned to menial tasks. We've learned that volunteers are often not assigned to tasks that capitalize on their unique skills and preferences. Many times, we've learned, that the jobs assigned to volunteers in the Smokies are those that are shunned by regular park employees. Accordingly, it is no surprise to us that you may find volunteers to be difficult to recruit and retain. If you agree that your volunteer program isn't as successful as you'd like, then you need to develop a new volunteer recruitment plan. We are certain you'd find a very large pool of willing applicants in the form of retirees in the surrounding communities.

- **Bottom line: Volunteers are out there waiting to provide the trail "patrol" services you need at only a small fraction of the cost you'd have to pay for a park ranger patrol.**

- Did your field personnel tell you how often hiking shelters are reserved but not used? Many nights we've stayed in both hiking shelters and backcountry campsites that were supposed to be full or nearly full only to find our party of two to be the only one there. Where were all of those other folks who made reservations? We can tell you from long-term experience that there are at least two reasons people over-book campsites and shelters: 1) They make dual reservations under different names to limit the number of people who'll be sharing the facilities and/or 2) They make an "extra" reservation for extra people and/or a different date range just to cover their as yet unconfirmed itinerary

(possible conversation...Question: *Are the three of us going to the Smokies backcountry next weekend or just you and me two weeks from now?...* Answer: *Why not make a reservation for both weekends for all three of us in case it rains next weekend.*). Any reservation system should, to the extent possible, ~~reward hikers for~~ cancelling unwanted reservations instead of penalizing them for cancellation. Otherwise, those scarce backcountry sites and shelters will continue to have empty spots instead of happy hikers.

- **Bottom line: If you've used prior years' reservations to calculate your projected revenues then you've likely overestimated backcountry usage.**

4. Require reservations for all backcountry sites.

- We agree. Just avoid trying to charge everyone a \$10 non-refundable online reservation fee in addition to the charges for the overnight camping permit. Speaking of charges per reservation, I think you've failed to fully disclose the true cost of the fee system that would result if your proposed fee structures were adopted. Perusing the current Recreation.gov website quickly reveals there is an additional non-refundable \$10 administrative fee for the online reservation. That \$10 is in addition to whatever fees are charged for the campsite, which in your examples would be in the range of only an additional \$5 per person or something thereabouts. Oh yeah, if I want to cancel then it is another non-refundable \$11 administrative processing fee.
- That \$5 per person per night fee seems mighty unlikely to change the status quo in terms of staffing for the backcountry information office and additional park ranger presence in the backcountry. Did you really figure that you'd get that many reservations? Here's the results we came up with:
 - \$80,000 for two staffers, plus \$50,000 for one (yes, only one) ranger with car = \$130,000/year additional costs. At only \$5 per person per night that would require:
 - 26,000 person-nights per year
 - An average of 71.23 people per night with paid reservations/permits staying in Smokies backcountry campgrounds (all 365 nights of the year—even those nasty, rainy, icy, freezing, sweltering nights when most sensible people stay home or in a warm motel room).
 - Most likely you'll see a significant decrease in backcountry camping if you require paid reservations and permits. This will further diminish your chances of generating sufficient revenue to achieve your cost recovery goals.
 - Consider briefly that with only one ranger roving all 800 miles of Smokies trails, just how much of a difference do you think it will make on the current problems you've identified (specifically, those that you felt could be improved by more ranger patrols)?
 - **Bottom line: Use volunteers to patrol the backcountry and equip them with radios so they can contact rangers to report problematic encounters. Skeptical? Please review our earlier comments on the use of volunteers.**

We hope our comments will be helpful in your decision process. We love the Smokies and wish only the best outcome for any changes to our current backcountry information and reservation system.

Respectfully submitted,

Al Smith & Janice Henderson (900 Milers and Smokies Hikers Since 1979)
644 Harold Drive
Maryville, TN 37803
865-984-7618

Email: Al Smith -- tnhiker@earthlink.net
Janice Henderson -- firepink@earthlink.net



s.oshields@gmail.com

08/25/2011 07:25 PM

To GRSMcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject From NPS.gov: backcountry fee

Email submitted from: s.oshields@gmail.com at /grsm/parknews/bc-permit-restructure.htm

Hello, I found the following blog post on GoSmokies. Since we talked at the SVC meeting last week I know you read the blogs from time to time. This post made my concern go up dramatically. Is there any truth to this? Mr Fuqua is not one to ramble off something this scandalous unless he thinks it to be the truth. Comment by L. Perry Fuqua "Get ready! ... cause here it comes!!! I might have been absent from this blog, but I guess I should chime in with what I have heard from outside this website. After speaking at length with a Washington Lobbyist who lobbies on behalf of everyone who uses federal lands (NPS, FS, BLM, etc.) I think he knows what he is talking about, and here are my questions and his answers, perhaps not verbatim, but close enough for this discussion. For this I will refer to myself as LP, and to the lobbyist as WL. LP: "So are you saying this is a done deal?" WL: "Absolutely!" LP: "Why do you say that?" WL: "What they want is to get their foot in the door as a test of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act so if it goes through other federal agencies like the Forest Service and BLM will have an open door to proceed with their own fee schedules for access to backcountry areas they control." LP: "The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act?" WL: "Yes, that is the 2004 law the folks at the National Park Service think gives them the right to charge the fees you are talking about. They may be misinterpreting the law, or bending it to suit their needs, but I guarantee it is where this is coming from. I have been hiking and camping in the Smokies for 20 years and I have never seen a ranger in the backcountry, but they need money and there are people who have complained about certain overused campsites, like those near the North Shore of Fontana where those shuttle boats carry them and all their supplies over to camp." LP: "I get your point, and though I haven't camped there the most damaged backcountry campsites I've seen are the ones that allow horse camping. What do you think about all the damage the horses do to the trails and the camps?" WL: "Well you can forget about that because those horse people have a very powerful lobby in Congress. Think about it, anybody who can afford to haul horses across the country to go camping and is a member of AQHA or whatever are organized a lot better than backpackers ever will be, plus they have the collective funds to make a stand as an organized group. Personally I know the park and just avoid those heavily used horse trails." LP: "So what should we do to fight this?" WL: "Well you need to go to your Congressmen, like Duncan ... he's always been big against overspending and if enough people call his offices he will have a need to look into it. He is probably your best ally in Tennessee to fight this thing I think those two public meetings they are having are required, but they might not affect the ultimate decision made by the NPS at the National level. Like I said this is a test case, and good luck. We are fighting this right along with you." Thank you for your response in advance on this pressing matter Seth O'Shields



"Katie Greene"
<katiegreene@tds.net>
08/25/2011 10:28 PM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc

Subject Charges for Back Country campers

I am very concerned about the possible plans to implement charges for Back Country camping. I wanted to attend the Open House meetings concerning this, but was unable to find the time and location until last night. Obviously, I missed them both.

I have no complaints with generating some additional monies for the Park. I do, however, have complaints with how that is to be accomplished. This needs to be an across the board issue, not just the one element that in general does the least damage to the area.

Frankly, I feel that times change and circumstances change, and it is past time to devise a way to charge an admissions fee just as every other National Park does. There could be a provision for local residents to have a free pass with proof of residency, for example to allow them to pass through anytime. For other Park visitors, though, there should be a charge. An annual pass could be offered as well as one time admissions. The "Road to Nowhere" was promised, and that was changed, so let's try to find a way to do it for our Park. I believe there are many who would support this idea if given the chance to do so.

It has been my experience that so called "day hikers" have (in general) less respect for the Park than those using the campgrounds and Back Country. The ones using that area have a love of the Park that almost defies reason. This charge being proposed poses hardships on many people. An example would be a Scout group planning a weekend camping trip. They would in essence be paying for damages caused in a picnic area or other site where no fee will be imposed.

I beg you to just hold off on a decision until other options can be considered and to have another open meeting that is well publicized with the time and date far enough in advance for people to be able to come and express there concerns and ideas.

I love this Park and do want to see it be able to maintain the standards allowed in the other Parks. I know the history, but know there is a workable solution to the problem. PLEASE FIND IT!!!!

Thank you for your time reading this.

Sincerely,

Katie Greene, Knoxville



timfell@att.net
08/25/2011 11:03 PM

184
To GRSMcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject From NPS.gov: Proposed Reservation Fee/Tax

Email submitted from: timfell@att.net at /grsm/parknews/bc-permit-restructure.htm

Mailing Address
Tim A Fell
453 Donovans Ln
Kodak, TN 37764
USA

I strongly oppose the proposed reservation/backcountry user fee/TAX. I feel this violates the spirit of the historical agreement between the State of Tn and the NPS. The Park recently received \$77.5 Million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, almost 5 times the annual budget, and it was all squandered on paving projects. \$33 Million wasted on a road nobody wants or cares about--the extension of the Foothills Pkwy. What an environmental disaster. How much does this proposed reservation system and additional backcountry patrol regime going to cost? Could you have maybe paved 1/2 mile less pavement? Why do you place a User Fee/TAX on some of the lowest impact visitors to the park, while squandering once-in-a-lifetime funding on catering to windshield tourists, who are the highest impact visitors to the park? How much is spending/yr on infrastructure for backcountry visitors? How much is spending/yr on infrastructure for automobiles? How many backpacker visits/yr?--~100K? How many pollution/ozone belching automobiles enter the Park every year, 1 MILLION, more? Why do you continue to cater to such a destructive force upon the Park such as the automobile? I thought the Smokies had air quality issues in part due to automobile emissions and you squander your stimulus \$ making it easier to bring more polluting cars into the park. I don't get it. Will holders of Federal Interagency Recreational Passes be charged the reservation fee/TAX for backpacking in the Park? User Fee = TAX I have sent a strongly worded letter to Congressman John J Duncan expressing my displeasure with the proposed reservation fee/TAX. Tim Fell, Kodak, Tn



Zack Bumgarner
<zacintosh@gmail.com>
08/25/2011 11:21 PM

105
To grsmcomments@nps.gov
cc
bcc
Subject Backcountry Permits

I think requiring permits for backcountry camping is an excellent idea for all the reasons stated in your proposal. A permitting system would help ensure that the people using backcountry campsites are prepared and also know the proper etiquette to follow. I have seen this work successfully in the Western Parks. I also like that the permit fees would go towards hiring more rangers to patrol these wilderness areas. I have seen many places where more rangers would be beneficial, even in the frontcountry (people harassing wildlife). I know that this National Park is already underfunded due to the lack of an entrance fee, so I think this would help.

Thank you,

Zack Bumgarner

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Great Smoky Mountains National Park

166



The mission of the National Park Service is "... to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." -National Park Service Organic Act, 16 U.S.C.

We Welcome Your Comments!

TALKED W/RANGER
KEVIN FITZGERALD

options to consider in addition to user fees;

1. Implementing a phased in "dispersed" backcountry site program. Have campin "zones" where camping is allowed ANY - where within that zone (i.e. GRAND TETON, This would lessen the severe impact being seen on current sites as well as lessen complaints of designated sites being full. Also this would enable more of a wilderness experience for those seeking solitude. In addition this policy would lessen the horse packer/backpacker interaction. Over time this could also lessen bear habituation to specific sites. (An option would be to rent bear proof food canisters for zone campers who camp away from current cable hanging systems. (over) ...

MAIL
→

JIMMY STEVENSON

Name 1385 OLD STAGE COACH RD.

Address Camden, SC 29020

City, State & Zip Code 803 432-1938

Daytime Phone 331-0623

jimmy STEVENSON @ALCONLABS.COM

1997

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Great Smoky Mountains National Park



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We Welcome Your Comments!

NO WAY - Should this
Fee ever be charged!
Upgrade the Backcountry office
to a 24 hr Reservation system in house
for this park.
Get the Road Rangers out of the
car and on the trail use the fines
to support the cost. Rangers are expected
to be in the backcountry anyway. Make it
a part of their contract that they must patrol
the trails a certain percentage of their time.

Name Matthew Briggs
Address 1008 Trotterway I
City, State & Zip Code Pigeon Forge TN 37863
Daytime Phone 865 719 8577

(over)



"Lenny Chew" <lchew@tampabay.rr.com>
08/26/2011 11:13 AM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>
cc
bcc

Subject Backcountry Office & Permit System Restructuring Proposal dated July 27, 2011

Hello,

I would encourage GSMNP to give consideration to the proposal modifications suggested by Mr. Al Smith. I am an avid outdoorsman and enjoyed an extended stay at GSMNP in the summer of 2009

Lenny Chew
Tampa, FL

----- Original Message -----

URL Link to Original proposal: [Original Smokies Proposal](#)

Date submitted: 8/25/2011

Last date for comments: 8/26/2011

Submitted via Email to: grsmcomments@nps.gov

Problem Identification by the NPS--Synopsis followed by our comments

1. *Complaints about the amount of time and effort it takes for visitors to get a backcountry reservation and/or acquire backcountry planning information.*

- We agree that it is sometimes difficult to make contact with the backcountry office via telephone. Also many times when we've visited personally, there were no NPS staff available in the backcountry office--notwithstanding the fact that during those times I discovered plenty of NPS staff available in the visitor center manning the information desk. Furthermore, there is no longer a

backcountry information office at the Oconaluftee visitor center—hikers on the NC side must travel all the way to Gatlinburg to get an in-person briefing.

2. ***"Frequent" requests from the public that more rangers be provided in backcountry areas to address problems such as dogs on trails, and permit and camping violations.***

- We've each hiked thousands of miles in the Smokies (all of the trails at least once, most of them two or three times and many of them several times) and have camped in the front country and backcountry scores of times over the past 20 years.

- a. Rarely have we seen problems in the backcountry with dogs on trails and we've never seen an attended dog on a trail more than 1 mile from the trailhead.
- b. We've only seen flagrant camping violations in two locations in the Smokies—Hazel Creek trail and Forney Creek trail; the worst was along Hazel Creek trail in 2006 and again in 2007 where hikers are allowed to use carts to ferry in equipment and supplies far in excess of what would be expected for a backcountry camping experience. We documented that problem with the NPS at the time and a subsequent change to the park's special regulations was made to address the use of carts along Hazel Creek trail. Unfortunately, use of carts was not forbidden (only the use of horse-drawn carts was banned) and the problem with excessive food & equipment being ferried into various campsites along Hazel Creek trail still exists today. This creates significant problems with compliance with food storage regulations and makes camping in sites along Hazel Creek more perilous for all hikers. Use of carts and pack animals should be banned on all trails leading to backcountry campsites. See my story "[Backpacking Fifth Avenue Style along Hazel Creek](#)". The violation on Forney Creek trail was in an illegal campsite only about 1/2 mile from the lake boundary where we found the after effects of a camping expedition that included lots of trash (much more than we could haul out in one trip), discarded camping supplies (propane bottles, cookware, sleeping bags, clothing, etc.) and unconsumed food.
- c. Complaints about permit violations must surely be restricted to those staying overnight in shelters along the AT where it has (always?) been the case that AT thru-hikers don't have to have a permit to stay overnight. Even though non thru-hikers with reservations are supposed to have priority on shelter space, the practical fact is that shelters along the AT are first-come, first-served when it comes to securing space to lay your sleeping bag during the season for AT thru-hiking. No permit system will change this and we already have a trail patrol system in place (AT Ridgerunners).

3. ***Public desire for more NPS personnel in Backcountry Information Office to provide trip planning services.***

- Problem #3 is just a restatement of problem #1. We agree that a full-time NPS staffer should be on hand during the stated 8 am - 6 pm period each day to address backcountry inquiries. With 800 miles of hiking trails in the park it seems to us a misallocation of park service human resources to not dedicate staff for this purpose.

4. ***"Frequent" usage beyond design capacity of non-reservation backcountry campsites which results in food storage violations and***

subsequent problems with dangerous wildlife encounters.

- Problem #4 is really much the same as problem #2 and our comments above for #2 address our views on that topic.

5. *Inability to "reliably" notify backcountry users of closed backcountry sites which in turn may result in more risk of injury or death to those visitors and/or wildlife.*

- We do not agree with the premise that a backcountry reservation system for all backcountry camping sites would result in a significant improvement in the ability to communicate the sudden closures of backcountry campsites to scheduled users. Frequently it is the case that backcountry hikers are not available via telephone during a period of up to several days before a planned overnight hike in the Smokies. It would be better to require backcountry users to make last minute verification of the status of backcountry campsites via methods which might include the bulletin board outside the backcountry planning office, the NPS website or some type of automated telephone message system (such as one with the ability to accept input of specific backcountry site numbers).

- *We suggest there is another "problem" Smokies park managers should address and that is the difference in adverse impact upon trails and camping facilities between visitors on horses vs. hikers on their own two feet.* Any reservation or permit system fee you establish should include higher fees for horse use since that usage results in significantly more adverse impact upon the trail and backcountry facilities. During our times on the trails, we've observed that horse riders frequently pack-in more food and leave more waste than mere hikers. This creates a much greater problem when it comes to food storage and campground clean-up. Anyone who regularly hikes trails used by horses and then hikes on hiker-only trails can attest to this fact as being readily apparent.

Al Smith & Janice Henderson's Comments Regarding Proposed Solution and Outcomes

Proposed Solutions & Outcomes Proposed by NPS followed by Al Smith & Janice Henderson's Comments

1. *Contract with Recreation.gov for online and call-in reservation services for all backcountry campsites in the Smokies. Park studies suggest that almost 100% of the reservations would then be made via Recreation.gov with only a few requiring input at a Backcountry Information Office in the Smokies.*
 - We like the concept of being able to see online the real-time campsite and hiking shelter availability.

- Freeing-up NPS personnel from reservation-only calls would be a good thing as long as they remain available to provide those "high quality" trip planning services in person and via phone instead of solely manning a visitor desk or engaging in other functions as is now apparently the case in the Sugarlands office. Unfortunately, it has been our experience that "high quality" trip planning often suffers when ill-informed personnel engage in briefings for backcountry hikers. A classic example we recall clearly involved a family group we met at the "tunnel" on the "Road-to-Nowhere" who were about to hike the full length of Forney Creek trail. They'd been briefed that morning by a park ranger (volunteer?) at Oconaluftee(?) but didn't have a clue that the route would include several (approximately 9) unbridged stream crossings--some of which would have been above knee-deep levels. Their group included small children and none of them were prepared for such an experience.
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 - Based upon current fee schedules, this service will cost backcountry campers \$10 per reservation just for the administrative processing fee collected by Recreation.gov and another \$11 for changes to or cancellation of any reservation made thru this system.
 - **Why not move the backcountry planning office to the main lobby of the visitor center(s) where backcountry staffers could brief both backcountry hikers and other visitors such as day hikers and automobile tourists?** It would be a much wiser use of human resources.
2. ***Most other parks with similar backcountry operations charge between \$10 and \$30 per reservation, and many have additional per person or per person, per night fees.***
- We strongly disagree with this summary. Only two parks similar to ours charge any kind of a fee for advance reservations and both of those offer free reservations for walk-ins. All four parks similar to ours in the continental U.S. offer free permits for backcountry camping. Here are the four specific examples of parks we believe to have "similar" backcountry operations as the Smokies:
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 - We think that Recreation.gov should not benefit to the tune of \$10 per reservation, without restriction or exception, for all reservations made to use backcountry campsites in the Smokies.

- What about last minute walk-ins?--shouldn't they be exempt from a reservation fee as is the case in each of the other four large parks we included in our comments for comparison?
- What about an annual pass or lifetime pass for backcountry camping in the Smokies? The annual or lifetime pass option would be attractive for locals like us who are retired and living on a fixed income but desire to continue to use the backcountry areas extensively.
- A pre-paid pass could also serve as a reward to be given to park volunteers, employees, key donors, etc.
- Again, we know that the third-party reservation system managers will not like the concept of a "free" or reduced fee for holders of annual or lifetime passes. It is very important that this provision be included in any negotiations for a contract.

3. Create a cost recovery fee structure for reservations that will generate revenue to cover both the contractor cost of the reservation system and support an increased NPS presence in the Backcountry Information Office and in the park's backcountry.

- Wow. That was a pretty expensive tally of services you've listed there. Just how expensive would it be to do all of those things? We suggest you've either severely underestimated the expense to hire enough people to do what you want or you've been way too optimistic about how many hikers will be paying those backcountry fees once you implement a mandatory reservation and permit system for all backcountry camping.
- We think you run the risk of adopting a system based upon incorrect usage projections only to find after a year of operation that you need to double or triple the permit fees to meet your original revenue goals. Already you're proposing a fee system that would cost two people about \$30 for a two night stay at one campsite in the Smokies. If they overnighted at two sites instead of one the fee would be \$40 for two people. That is pretty close to outrageous. If after a year of operation you find you need to double or triple permit costs from the \$5/night per person levels, such a move would, for many people, make backcountry camping untenable due to the high cost for a reservation and permit.
- We considered how much it would cost you to add two experienced staffers for the backcountry office function. By our estimate, you'd have to allocate at least \$80,000 per year to get two full-time staffers with enough experience to be backcountry planning qualified. How about park rangers for trail patrols? Darn, we don't think you've really thought this out when it comes to how many rangers it would take to provide anything more than a token presence in the backcountry. **There is a viable alternative to having park rangers patrol backcountry trails and campsites: Use Volunteers.**
 - You should recruit, train and equip seasonal volunteer "Wilderness Guards" like are used by the U.S. Forest Service to patrol wilderness trails all across the U.S. The cost to the government is minimal and those dedicated volunteers greatly enhance the overall experience for most hikers with whom they come in contact--plus the added benefit is a much improved voluntary compliance with park/wilderness regulations. And the cost? A pittance compared with the cost of hiring full-time park rangers.
 - Before you dismiss the problems with recruiting and retaining volunteers, you should make a detailed comparison of the overall process used by the NPS vs. that used by agencies such as the USFS and even private agencies such as the Student Conservation Association (SCA). One of us (Al Smith) has volunteered for both of those groups and even *considered* being a

volunteer for the park service here in the Smokies (until he got the 3 lbs. of paper forms required to apply). Further, we've had the opportunity to interact with some of the volunteers in the Smokies and almost universally they report feeling underappreciated, overworked and oftentimes assigned to menial tasks. We've learned that volunteers are often not assigned to tasks that capitalize on their unique skills and preferences. Many times, we've learned, that the jobs assigned to volunteers in the Smokies are those that are shunned by regular park employees. Accordingly, it is no surprise to us that you may find volunteers to be difficult to recruit and retain. If you agree that your volunteer program isn't as successful as you'd like, then you need to develop a new volunteer recruitment plan. We are certain you'd find a very large pool of willing applicants in the form of retirees in the surrounding communities.

- **Bottom line: Volunteers are out there waiting to provide the trail "patrol" services you need at only a small fraction of the cost you'd have to pay for a park ranger patrol.**

- Did your field personnel tell you how often hiking shelters are reserved but not used? Many nights we've stayed in both hiking shelters and backcountry campsites that were supposed to be full or nearly full only to find our party of two to be the only one there. Where were all of those other folks who made reservations? We can tell you from long-term experience that there are at least two reasons people over-book campsites and shelters: 1) They make dual reservations under different names to limit the number of people who'll be sharing the facilities and/or 2) They make an "extra" reservation for extra people and/or a different date range just to cover their as yet unconfirmed itinerary (possible conversation...Question: *Are the three of us going to the Smokies backcountry next weekend or just you and me two weeks from now?*... Answer: *Why not make a reservation for both weekends for all three of us in case it rains next weekend.*). Any reservation system should, to the extent possible, reward hikers for cancelling unwanted reservations instead of penalizing them for cancellation. Otherwise, those scarce backcountry sites and shelters will continue to have empty spots instead of happy hikers.

- **Bottom line: if you've used prior years' reservations to calculate your projected revenues then you've likely overestimated backcountry usage.**

4. **Require reservations for all backcountry sites.**

- We agree. Just avoid trying to charge everyone a \$10 non-refundable online reservation fee in addition to the charges for the overnight camping permit. Speaking of charges per reservation, I think you've failed to fully disclose the true cost of the fee system that would result if your proposed fee structures were adopted. Perusing the current Recreation.gov website quickly reveals there is an additional non-refundable \$10 administrative fee for the online reservation. That \$10 is in addition to whatever fees are charged for the campsite, which in your examples would be in the range of only an additional \$5 per person or something thereabouts. Oh yeah, if I want to cancel then it is another non-refundable \$11 administrative processing fee.

- That \$5 per person per night fee seems mighty unlikely to change the status quo in terms of staffing for the backcountry information office and additional park ranger presence in the backcountry. Did you really figure that you'd get that many reservations? Here's the results we came up with:

- \$80,000 for two staffers, plus \$50,000 for one (yes, only one) ranger with car = \$130,000/year additional costs. At only \$5

per person per night that would require:

- 26,000 person-nights per year
- An average of 71.23 people per night with paid reservations/permits staying in Smokies backcountry campgrounds (all 365 nights of the year--even those nasty, rainy, icy, freezing, sweltering nights when most sensible people stay home or in a warm motel room).
- Most likely you'll see a significant decrease in backcountry camping if you require paid reservations and permits. This will further diminish your chances of generating sufficient revenue to achieve your cost recovery goals.
- Consider briefly that with only one ranger roving all 800 miles of Smokies trails, just how much of a difference do you think it will make on the current problems you've identified (specifically, those that you felt could be improved by more ranger patrols)?
- **Bottom line: Use volunteers to patrol the backcountry and equip them with radios so they can contact rangers to report problematic encounters. Skeptical? Please review our earlier comments on the use of volunteers.**

We hope our comments will be helpful in your decision process. We love the Smokies and wish only the best outcome for any changes to our current backcountry information and reservation system.

Respectfully submitted,

Al Smith & Janice Henderson (900 Milers and Smokies Hikers Since 1979)
644 Harold Drive
Maryville, TN 37803
865-984-7618

Email: Al Smith -- tnhiker@earthlink.net

Janice Henderson -- firepink@earthlink.net



Andy Wallace <Andy@AdvisorForLife.com>

08/26/2011 12:14 PM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Comments Regarding GSMNP's Backcountry Office & Permit System Restructuring Proposal

Dear Sir/Ma'am,

I hope this email finds you doing well. Thanks for your willingness to take our feedback on this important and complex matter. I know you are trying to achieve the best possible solution. I understand the deadline for the public to share their opinions is today (<http://www.nps.gov/grsm/parkmgmt/upload/BC-Reservation-Restructuring-Proposal.pdf>). Please excuse my procrastination in collecting my thoughts and getting them to you in writing.

Specifically, my passion for the account was born as a boy scout early in life. As I got older and boy scouts got trumped by fumes (car fumes and perfume) and as a result, my time in the back country dwindled until college.

College brought about the a fresh dose of the real world for me: the stress of balancing all of my responsibilities and a need to escape from it all. The backdrop behind these two competing issues in my life was a limited budget. Hence, I found my self coming back to the wilderness. And lucky for me it was essentially free of cost and nearby! Oh, my gear wasn't as nice as it is today. My knowledge and appreciation for the trails and all the history therein is faint in comparison to where it stands today. However, my thirst for an escape to God's creation, where the world and it's problems seem to melt away was oh so very real and desirable. Needless to say, it re-kindled my love with the back country. Today I am an avid hiker, Lifetime member of the Great Smoky Mountains Association, and father of two boys who frequent the back country as often as possible.

I can't help but wonder: would this love affair have never re-kindled were I to have needed to clear these new proposed requirements and cost? I am afraid so. Ten or twenty bucks isn't alot of money to some working adults, but to the future of our Park (youth to young adults) it may be the very hindrance that keeps them away from this treasure in our backyards called the Great Smoky Mountains. And, it would do so during the years in which it is critical for them to be there. And who knows what that may cost?

FINALLY, I would add three footnotes to my feedback:

1. I have used Recreation.gov to go to Indian Boundary (Cherokee National Forest). It is not as efficient as it sounds. Frankly it is frustrating and cumbersome as many camping trips that are nearby (for locals) tend to be spur of the moment or day or so in advance plan where the local loads up and heads out the door to go to a nearby camp site. Recreation.gov essential destroys these types of trips as booking at Indian Boundary is

closed a week out, regardless of availability.

So, I frequently head up to Indian Boundary and find a walk up campsite on the day I arrive. Sure, I may not get the choice location that might be afforded with some prior planning, but I get a spot at a lower cost (overflow always has availability and cost less) and I don't have to wade thru the headache of Recreation.gov. Do we really want to make it harder for folks to use the park?

2. What happened to the promise to the original land owners/donors and fundraisers to keep the park accessible to all, at no cost? Will day hikers be next? How about cars who enter the park? The never ending demand on the parks resources beckons a solution, but the bureaucratic tendency to solve everything by charging/collecting more money is not always the answer.

And to counter the immediate response that front country camp grounds have charged fees for years is comparing apples to oranges. Overnight backpackers have significantly less impact than an RV or even a car/tent camper who uses a developed campground given the associated costs it takes to maintain the facilities and personal that it takes to run a front country campground. So please, let's make sure we are considering all the facts before we justify charging backcountry fees only because we charge front country camping fees.

3. In light of # 2 above, and in breaking down this situation and responding to each item with specific feedback, I couldn't agree more with Al Smith's observations and comments. Please add my endorsement to his insightful observations and recommended solutions, below:

Problem Identification by the NPS--Synopsis followed by our comments

1. *Complaints about the amount of time and effort it takes for visitors to get a backcountry reservation and/or acquire backcountry planning information.*

✎ We agree that it is sometimes difficult to make contact with the backcountry office via telephone. Also many times when we've visited personally, there were no NPS staff available in the backcountry office--notwithstanding the fact that during those times I discovered plenty of NPS staff available in the visitor center manning the information desk. Furthermore, there is no longer a backcountry information office at the Oconaluftee visitor center--hikers on the NC side must travel all the way to Gatlinburg to get an in-person briefing.

2. *"Frequent" requests from the public that more rangers be provided in backcountry areas to address problems such as dogs on trails, and permit and camping violations.*

✎ We've each hiked thousands of miles in the Smokies (all of the trails at least once, most of them two or three times and many of them several times) and have camped in the front country and backcountry scores of times over the past 20 years.

a. Rarely have we seen problems in the backcountry with dogs on trails and we've never seen an attended dog on a trail more than 1 mile from the trailhead.

b. We've only seen flagrant camping violations in two locations in the Smokies--Hazel Creek trail and Forney Creek trail; the worst was along Hazel Creek trail in 2006 and again in 2007 where hikers are allowed to use carts to ferry in equipment and

supplies far in excess of what would be expected for a backcountry camping experience. We documented that problem with the NPS at the time and a subsequent change to the park's special regulations was made to address the use of carts along Hazel Creek trail. Unfortunately, use of carts was not forbidden (only the use of horse-drawn carts was banned) and the problem with excessive food & equipment being ferried into various campsites along Hazel Creek trail still exists today. This creates significant problems with compliance with food storage regulations and makes camping in sites along Hazel Creek more perilous for all hikers. Use of carts and pack animals should be banned on all trails leading to backcountry campsites. See my story "[Backpacking Fifth Avenue Style along Hazel Creek](#)". The violation on Forney Creek trail was in an illegal campsite only about 1/2 mile from the lake boundary where we found the after effects of a camping expedition that included lots of trash (much more than we could haul out in one trip), discarded camping supplies (propane bottles, cookware, sleeping bags, clothing, etc.) and unconsumed food.

c. Complaints about permit violations must surely be restricted to those staying overnight in shelters along the AT where it has (always?) been the case that AT thru-hikers don't have to have a permit to stay overnight. Even though non thru-hikers with reservations are supposed to have priority on shelter space, the practical fact is that shelters along the AT are first-come, first-served when it comes to securing space to lay your sleeping bag during the season for AT thru-hiking. No permit system will change this and we already have a trail patrol system in place (AT Ridgerunners).

3. **Public desire for more NPS personnel in Backcountry Information Office to provide trip planning services.**

¶1. Problem #3 is just a restatement of problem #1. We agree that a full-time NPS staffer should be on hand during the stated 8 am - 6 pm period each day to address backcountry inquiries. With 800 miles of hiking trails in the park it seems to us a misallocation of park service human resources to not dedicate staff for this purpose.

4. **"Frequent" usage beyond design capacity of non-reservation backcountry campsites which results in food storage violations and subsequent problems with dangerous wildlife encounters.**

¶1. Problem #4 is really much the same as problem #2 and our comments above for #2 address our views on that topic.

5. **Inability to "reliably" notify backcountry users of closed backcountry sites which in turn may result in more risk of injury or death to those visitors and/or wildlife.**

¶1. We do not agree with the premise that a backcountry reservation system for all backcountry camping sites would result in a significant improvement in the ability to communicate the sudden closures of backcountry campsites to scheduled users. Frequently it is the case that backcountry hikers are not available via telephone during a period of up to several days before a planned overnight hike in the Smokies. It would be better to require backcountry users to make last minute verification of the status of backcountry campsites via methods which might include the bulletin board outside the backcountry planning office, the NPS website or some type of automated telephone message system (such as one with the ability to accept input of specific backcountry site numbers).

¶1. **We suggest there is another "problem" Smokies park managers should address and that is the difference in adverse impact upon trails and camping facilities between visitors on horses vs. hikers on their own two feet.** Any reservation or permit system fee you establish should include higher fees for horse use since that usage results in significantly more adverse impact upon the trail and backcountry facilities. During our times on the trails, we've observed that horse riders frequently pack-in more food and leave more waste

than mere hikers. This creates a much greater problem when it comes to food storage and campground clean-up. Anyone who regularly hikes trails used by horses and then hikes on hiker-only trails can attest to this fact as being readily apparent.

Al Smith & Janice Henderson's Comments Regarding Proposed Solution and Outcomes

Proposed Solutions & Outcomes Proposed by NPS followed by Al Smith & Janice Henderson's Comments

1. *Contract with Recreation.gov for online and call-in reservation services for all backcountry campsites in the Smokies. Park studies suggest that almost 100% of the reservations would then be made via Recreation.gov with only a few requiring input at a Backcountry Information Office in the Smokies.*

☞ We like the concept of being able to see online the real-time campsite and hiking shelter availability.

☞ Freeing-up NPS personnel from reservation-only calls would be a good thing as long as they remain available to provide those

"high quality" trip planning services in person and via phone instead of solely manning a visitor desk or engaging in other functions as is now apparently the case in the Sugarlands office. Unfortunately, it has been our experience that "high quality" trip planning often suffers when ill-informed personnel engage in briefings for backcountry hikers. A classic example we recall clearly involved a family group we met at the "tunnel" on the "Road-to-Nowhere" who were about to hike the full length of Forney Creek trail. They'd been briefed that morning by a park ranger (volunteer?) at Oconaluftee(?) but didn't have a clue that the route would include several (approximately 9) unbridged stream crossings--some of which would have been above knee-deep levels. Their group included small children and none of them were prepared for such an experience.

☞ Recreation.gov is not a substitute for a real person with specific knowledge of Smokies trails. The Recreation.gov organization handles hundreds of sites with an almost infinite variety of conditions. There is no way a briefing sheet system can be used to provide reliable information on something as complex as a hiking trip involving one or more trails in the Smokies. People requiring that amount of detail will still be looking to contact the Backcountry Information Office.

☞ Based upon current fee schedules, this service will cost backcountry campers \$10 per reservation just for the administrative

processing fee collected by Recreation.gov and another \$11 for changes to or cancellation of any reservation made thru this system.

☞ **Why not move the backcountry planning office to the main lobby of the visitor center(s) where backcountry staffers could brief both backcountry hikers and other visitors such as day hikers and automobile tourists?** It would be a much wiser use of human resources.

2. *Most other parks with similar backcountry operations charge between \$10 and \$30 per reservation, and many have additional per person or per person, per night fees.*

☞ We strongly disagree with this summary. Only two parks similar to ours charge any kind of a fee for advance reservations and both of those offer free reservations for walk-ins. All four parks similar to ours in the continental U.S. offer free permits for backcountry camping. Here are the four specific examples of parks we believe to have "similar" backcountry operations as the Smokies:

☞ Glacier NP. 700+ miles of trails. Reservation fee: None. Permit fee: None

☞ Yellowstone NP. 1100 miles of trails! Reservation fee: \$20 for reservations 48 hours or more in advance. Walk-in reservations (within 48 hours of trip start) are FREE. Permit fee: None.

☞ Yosemite NP. 750 miles of trails. Reservation fee: \$5 plus \$5/person for advance reservations. No charge for changes. Walk-in reservations: Free (for trips beginning up to one day prior to the wilderness (backcountry) trip). Permit fee: None.

☞ Shenandoah NP. 500+ miles of trails. Reservations not required. Permit fee: None

☞ The online reservation system is a service we'd be glad to pay to have at our fingertips, however, \$10 per reservation seems steep. How about \$5 per reservation?

☞ We think that Recreation.gov should not benefit to the tune of \$10 per reservation, without restriction or exception, for all reservations made to use backcountry campsites in the Smokies.

☞ What about last minute walk-ins?—shouldn't they be exempt from a reservation fee as is the case in each of the other four large parks we included in our comments for comparison?

☞ What about an annual pass or lifetime pass for backcountry camping in the Smokies? The annual or lifetime pass option would be attractive for locals like us who are retired and living on a fixed income but desire to continue to use the backcountry areas extensively.

☞ A pre-paid pass could also serve as a reward to be given to park volunteers, employees, key donors, etc.

☞ Again, we know that the third-party reservation system managers will not like the concept of a "free" or reduced fee for holders of annual or lifetime passes. It is very important that this provision be included in any negotiations for a contract.

3. Create a cost recovery fee structure for reservations that will generate revenue to cover both the contractor cost of the reservation system and support an increased NPS presence in the Backcountry Information Office and in the park's backcountry.

☞ Wow. That was a pretty expensive tally of services you've listed there. Just how expensive would it be to do all of those things? We suggest you've either severely underestimated the expense to hire enough people to do what you want or you've been way too optimistic about how many hikers will be paying those backcountry fees once you implement a mandatory reservation and permit system for all backcountry camping.

☞ We think you run the risk of adopting a system based upon incorrect usage projections only to find after a year of operation that you need to double or triple the permit fees to meet your original revenue goals. Already you're proposing a fee system that would cost two people about \$30 for a two night stay at one campsite in the Smokies. If they overnighted at two sites instead of one the fee would be \$40 for two people. That is pretty close to outrageous. If after a year of operation you find you need to double or triple permit costs from the \$5/night per person levels, such a move would, for many people, make backcountry camping untenable due to the high cost for a reservation and permit.

☞ We considered how much it would cost you to add two experienced staffers for the backcountry office function. By our estimate, you'd have to allocate at least \$80,000 per year to get two full-time staffers with enough experience to be backcountry planning qualified. How about park rangers for trail patrols? Darn, we don't think you've really thought this out when it comes to how many rangers it would take to provide anything more than a token presence in the backcountry. **There is a viable alternative to having park rangers patrol backcountry trails and campsites: Use Volunteers.**

¶ You should recruit, train and equip seasonal volunteer "Wilderness Guards" like are used by the U.S. Forest Service to patrol wilderness trails all across the U.S. The cost to the government is minimal and those dedicated volunteers greatly enhance the overall experience for most hikers with whom they come in contact—plus the added benefit is a much improved voluntary compliance with park/wilderness regulations. And the cost? A pittance compared with the cost of hiring full-time park rangers.

¶ Before you dismiss the problems with recruiting and retaining volunteers, you should make a detailed comparison of the overall process used by the NPS vs. that used by agencies such as the USFS and even private agencies such as the Student Conservation Association (SCA). One of us (Al Smith) has volunteered for both of those groups and even *considered* being a volunteer for the park service here in the Smokies (until he got the 3 lbs. of paper forms required to apply). Further, we've had the opportunity to interact with some of the volunteers in the Smokies and almost universally they report feeling underappreciated, overworked and oftentimes assigned to menial tasks. We've learned that volunteers are often not assigned to tasks that capitalize on their unique skills and preferences. Many times, we've learned, that the jobs assigned to volunteers in the Smokies are those that are shunned by regular park employees. Accordingly, it is no surprise to us that you may find volunteers to be difficult to recruit and retain. If you agree that your volunteer program isn't as successful as you'd like, then you need to develop a new volunteer recruitment plan. We are certain you'd find a very large pool of willing applicants in the form of retirees in the surrounding communities.

¶ **Bottom line: Volunteers are out there waiting to provide the trail "patrol" services you need at only a small fraction of the cost you'd have to pay for a park ranger patrol.**

¶ Did your field personnel tell you how often hiking shelters are reserved but not used? Many nights we've stayed in both hiking shelters and backcountry campsites that were supposed to be full or nearly full only to find our party of two to be the only one there. Where were all of those other folks who made reservations? We can tell you from long-term experience that there are at least two reasons people over-book campsites and shelters: 1) They make dual reservations under different names to limit the number of people who'll be sharing the facilities and/or 2) They make an "extra" reservation for extra people and/or a different date range just to cover their as yet unconfirmed itinerary (possible conversation... Question: *Are the three of us going to the Smokies backcountry next weekend or just you and me two weeks from now?*... Answer: *Why not make a reservation for both weekends for all three of us in case it rains next weekend.*). Any reservation system should, to the extent possible, reward hikers for cancelling unwanted reservations instead of penalizing them for cancellation. Otherwise, those scarce backcountry sites and shelters will continue to have empty spots instead of happy hikers.

• **Bottom line: If you've used prior years' reservations to calculate your projected revenues then you've likely overestimated backcountry usage.**

4. Require reservations for all backcountry sites.

¶ We agree. Just avoid trying to charge everyone a \$10 non-refundable online reservation fee in addition to the charges for the overnight camping permit. Speaking of charges per reservation, I think you've failed to fully disclose the true cost of the fee system that would result if your proposed fee structures were adopted. Perusing the current Recreation.gov website quickly reveals there is an additional non-refundable \$10 administrative fee for the online reservation. That \$10 is in addition to whatever fees are charged

for the campsite, which in your examples would be in the range of only an additional \$5 per person or something thereabouts. Oh yeah, if I want to cancel then it is another non-refundable \$11 administrative processing fee.

☞ That \$5 per person per night fee seems mighty unlikely to change the status quo in terms of staffing for the backcountry information office and additional park ranger presence in the backcountry. Did you really figure that you'd get that many reservations? Here's the results we came up with:

☞ \$80,000 for two staffers, plus \$50,000 for one (yes, only one) ranger with car = \$130,000/year additional costs. At only \$5 per person per night that would require:

① 26,000 person-nights per year

① An average of 71.23 people per night with paid reservations/permits staying in Smokies backcountry campgrounds (all 365 nights of the year—even those nasty, rainy, icy, freezing, sweltering nights when most sensible people stay home or in a warm motel room).

① Most likely you'll see a significant decrease in backcountry camping if you require paid reservations and permits. This will further diminish your chances of generating sufficient revenue to achieve your cost recovery goals.

☞ Consider briefly that with only one ranger roving all 800 miles of Smokies trails, just how much of a difference do you think it will make on the current problems you've identified (specifically, those that you felt could be improved by more ranger patrols)?

☞ **Bottom line: Use volunteers to patrol the backcountry and equip them with radios so they can contact rangers to report problematic encounters. Skeptical? Please review our earlier comments on the use of volunteers.**

We hope our comments will be helpful in your decision process. We love the Smokies and wish only the best outcome for any changes to our current backcountry information and reservation system.

Respectfully submitted,

Al Smith & Janice Henderson (900 Milers and Smokies Hikers Since 1979)
644 Harold Drive
Maryville, TN 37803
865-984-7618

==END OF AL SMITH/JANICE HENDERSON COMMENTS==

Again, thanks in advance for your thoughtful consideration.

Andrew Wallace
PO Box 1428
Seymour, TN 37865
865-742-4222



kevinumberger@gmail.com
08/26/2011 02:55 PM

To GRSMcomments@nps.gov

cc

bcc

Subject From NPS.gov: backcountry fees

Email submitted from: kevinumberger@gmail.com at /grsm/parknews/bc-permit-restructure.htm

Mailing Address

Kevin Umberger
3817 woodlake drive
knoxville, tn 37918
usa

Howdy..... Thank you for trying to find a solution to the ever growing backcountry permit system. I favor a modest fee paid by all users of the park.....I don't mind paying a fee if its a fair and even fee among various user groups. Also I would like to see a fee for livestock that is brought into the park. Please do keep in concern that there are many of us that stay in the park many nights. I have to look at it through my wallet.....therefore I favor the smallest fee possible. I look forward to a more efficient reservation system along with knowing that a campsite wont be overcrowded.



David Bryant <dlbryant01@yahoo.com>

08/26/2011 03:19 PM

Please respond to
David Bryant

<dlbryant01@yahoo.com>

To "grsmcomments@nps.gov" <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry Office & Permit System Restructuring Proposal

I support the proposed change of outsourcing the backcountry reservations to recreation.gov and for having a nominal charge that covers the administration of the reservations and allows for increased ranger time in the backcountry.

Regards,

David Bryant



"John Oakberg" <oakbergj@bellsouth.net>
08/26/2011 07:35 PM

To <grsmcomments@nps.gov>

cc

bcc

Subject Backcountry Permit Proposal

Having first visited the Park 60 years ago at a very young age, I have seen many changes. Considering the current situations concerning wildlife management (bears, in particular), lack of a regular Ranger presence in the backcountry and impacts on visit quality visit, I am pleased the issues raised are being addressed.

Getting right to the point, I am in full support of all campsites being on a reservation-only basis and agree to a use fee. Although many years ago these steps were not necessary, the time has come for GRSM to join with what is the practice in many other National Parks.

I have some general comments, in no specific order:

- (1) The suggested fee of 5 (or the 4 mentioned) dollars per person per night would be fine with me. That way, if one person wanted a solo trip for just one night, the cost would be minimal and still would not be much even if two nights (e.g. over a weekend) were spent in the backcountry;
- (2) In addition to Rangers, some Volunteers could be used as well to control backcountry use, maybe in conjunction with the ATT, AAC and Trekker programs;
- (3) If concession permit holders who lead outings on a paying basis will continue to be allowed to provide their services in the backcountry, I suggest a review of their restrictions so the other (private) visitors would not need to compete with a business for space in the backcountry. One idea would be to give businesses 10 days ahead of their trip (instead of 30 for others) to make their reservation as well as limiting the sites they could use and on what days they could go;
- (4) Based on past permits, review the average party size and consider reducing the maximum (maybe to 6?).

I hope this is of assistance and I am available to discuss the above points as well as other ideas as they arise. Please do not hesitate to contact me if necessary.

John Oakberg
865-428-6265

193
August 25, 2011

Mr. Dale Ditmanson, Superintendent
Great Smoky Mountains National Park
107 Park Headquarters Rd.
Gatlinburg, TN 37738

Dear Superintendent Ditmanson:

I am writing at this time to ask for your assistance in keeping the archives and artifacts over here in Swain County, North Carolina and not put them in Townsend, Tn. This would be the most appropriate place for these archives to be held and displayed for our future generations. Since Swain County lost so much of its land to the development of the Park years ago, it is the only fair thing to do for this North Carolina County. As a child of this Park, I was raised as a young child in the Park over here on the Oconaluftee side, as my Father worked for the Park for thirty years, so I truly love this Park. I remember years and years ago there were lots of artifacts stored at the Oconaluftee Visitors Center, these were so interesting to me in my young years. *AMSTRONG STANLEY*

Also, on another note, I understand there is talk of charging fees for backpacking in the Park. All my years growing up in the Park I remember my Father and other Park family friends saying one good thing, there can never be a fee charged for the public to visit the Park, for me to always remember that in the future, so I did. The Park is so beautiful and one of a kind in the world, so it should be to where anyone can enter the Park, even to backpacking people, without paying a fee to do so. I hope you will take all this into consideration as I want my grandchildren to be able to enjoy the Park as I have done for all my life without worrying about paying to visit it. *BE PAID FEE*

Thank you for listening to my story. I enjoyed meeting you at the Volunteer Banquet in Gatlinburg few years ago, I still volunteer and love the Park and will do whatever it takes to keep it like it is at this time.

Sincerely,

Connie Hester Pollack

Connie Hester Pollack
P. O. Box 2424
Bryson City, NC 28713

*Heather:
copy to
Melissa
pls CF*